

THE  
AMERICAN  
DRAMATIST

MONTROSE  
J. MOSES

Boston University



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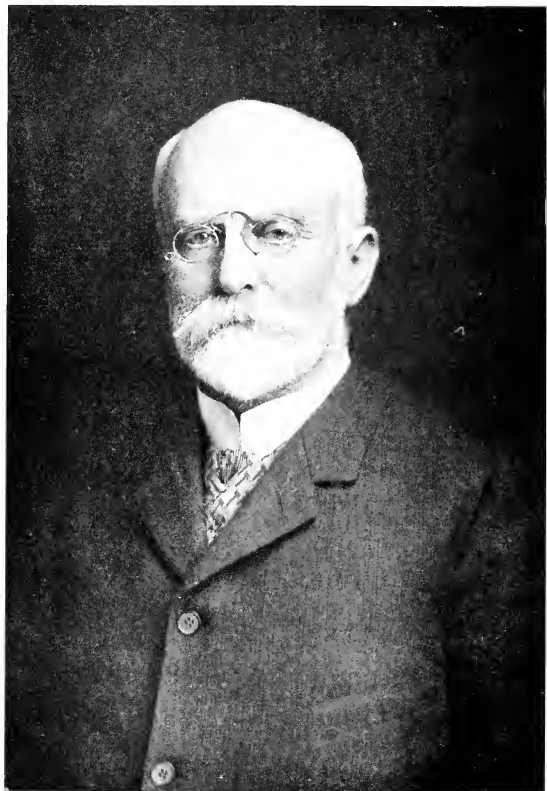




THE AMERICAN DRAMATIST



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BRONSON HOWARD

# THE AMERICAN DRAMATIST

BY

MONTROSE J. MOSES

AUTHOR OF "THE LITERATURE OF THE SOUTH," "HENRIK IBSEN,  
THE MAN AND HIS PLAYS," ETC.

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
THREE AMERICAN DRAMATISTS

BRONSON HOWARD  
JAMES A. HERNE  
CLYDE FITCH





## PREFACE

THERE is no book treating distinctively of the American Dramatist and his work. This volume is therefore designed to meet a want which some day will be felt, though at present the literary critic contents himself in the belief that there is no American drama, and never has been. Be this as it may, the activity has none the less existed, and no literary treatise has dealt with it properly.

The task has been a very agreeable one, but not easy, for the material is scattered, and each year becomes more chaotic. If the student of the drama does not begin to realize that dramatic records must be preserved, there will never be any hope for the future literary historian who might desire to consider the evolution of American drama. The copyright law governing theatre literature should require at least one copy of a play registered in Washington, provided, of course, it has been given adequate production.

Such precaution would assure to the student that which is his by right — the means of following a certain art activity which, even though it cannot now stand the test of pure literary comparison, at least appealed to popular taste and reflected popular interest.

Had it not been for the whole-souled assistance rendered me at every turn, this book would have been impossible to write. I have had access to private papers, I have spent many pleasant and profitable hours examining manuscripts, and studying personalities. These are the attractive moments that give human value to work which could be readily swamped in detail.

But research requires patience, and one is brought suddenly to a grim realization of its slowness. When this book was begun, A. M. Palmer was alive; during its initial period I profited by the unfailing help and encouragement of Bronson Howard, and later I was made to feel the necessity for such a book through the splendid enthusiasm of Clyde Fitch. Chapters written then have had to be altered because these men are dead. But they are not forgotten even though the literary critic fail to recognize them.

The American drama is a fact; it has a body, whatever the value of its spirit. In its local sense, it is a reflection of local condition and type characteristics; in its technical sense, it exhibits special mannerisms, and shows itself subjected to special influences. The American dramatist has evolved from certain social factors, and his product — the American drama — has developed by reason of theatrical economics. There are always definite reasons to be found for every literary activity. If at one time the American stage was filled with American types of similar cartoon value, such was the accepted convention of the time; if there was more French attitude than American in the early society drama, it was because French technique was being imitated; if Bronson Howard has a right to the title of Dean of the American Drama, he must have stemmed a current that opposed him; if journalism dominates our stage to-day, there must be some reason for the reportorial treatment of most of our present native drama.

I have tried to carry out this plan in the following pages: to emphasize the individual contributions to the idea of an American drama, to summarize the striking qualities of dramatists who are original in position, to enumerate the social and economic causes affecting the theatre, and through the theatre limiting the dramatist's work.

My indebtedness is great, largely measured by a bib-

liography which I have compiled for the benefit of the American student. This bibliography, with the one appended to my "Famous Actor-Families of America," in general covers the field of theatrical activity in this country.

In particular, I wish to acknowledge the courtesy shown me by the library authorities of Columbia University. The New York Public Library contains a most valuable collection of material, which has yet to be properly sorted. To Mrs. James A. Herne, Professor Brander Matthews, Mr. Percy Mackaye, and others, I take this opportunity of extending my thanks for their generous desire to aid me.

My thanks are also due to the Editors of *The Book News Monthly*, *The Independent*, *The Bellman*, *The Forum*, and *The Theatre Magazine* for permission to use certain articles which I have published from time to time.

MONTROSE J. MOSES.



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# THE AMERICAN DRAMATIST

## CHAPTER I

### DRAMA AS A SOCIAL FORCE

WE are so prone to pin our faith to terms, that we are quite in danger of receiving a distorted idea of drama as art, and of the theatre as a social institution. It is well to note that frenzied drama has been tried and found wanting. After all, it is bad economics to shut one's eyes to the character of popular, average returns on one's investments. It is incumbent upon us to lay significant stress upon the moral accountability of the theatre to the civic body as a civic institution, and of the playwright to the community as a citizen. But the manager has a right to expect some tangible response from his audiences in exchange for amusement given them. The freedom of the theatre from the calculating touch of commercialism would be only *one* of the agents to call forth the best energies of the citizen-playwright in America.

The endowed institution, much less a subsidized theatre, would not alone create the art demand, would not alone call forth the highest type of communal expression, would not alone establish the poet as dramatist, even though he might have his hand upon the pulse of the people. There is a deeper education to be done first; for in every true movement which has carried the world forward in its progressive growth, the real dramatist has risen above conditions, and, by seeming acceptance of physical and formal convention, has, in the end, forced convention with him.

Critics of the theatre are prone to rush headlong into a most complicated of machines, and expect to change in the twinkling of an eye the whole social, economic, æsthetic, and spiritual organism of the institution. At least it were wiser to take conditions as they are, rather than to supplant them with chimerical and untried theories. For everyone will agree that in the education of theatre audiences, the first essential is to begin with the audiences; not to close the vaudeville houses to them, but to make them challenge the validity of their fragmentary amusement, and to think on the possible enjoyment of higher things. The American theatre manager of the present has much on his side of the argument, when he holds fast to certain types of theatrical successes, until he is assured of a different demand; until he is certain that his change of bill will guarantee him against loss.

The greatest hope of the theatre to-day rests with the people. The first expressions of communal art came from the people; the Greek drama developed from a national sentiment and from a national religious custom. The modern stage came into existence through a church necessity and by way of vulgar tongue and guild support. So we see that, institutionally, the art of representing life has always been called into use for social purposes. However much it has been elaborated from the old *vocero* or tribal songs of grief, and from the *tropes* of the church service; however much it has departed from the dithyrambic chorus, it has made its appeal to the crowd. The theatre that is cut aloof from the crowd, if it is not altogether impossible, is at least so anæmic that its energies are squandered for want of the red blood of popular appreciation. The whole art value of drama is at first determined by the extent of its instant appeal to a crowd; and there are as many types of drama as there are broad communal appeals.

The mistaken idea has long been held that the play is a thing governed wholly by the caprice of the dramatist. The theatre is always close to life, and exists by reason of communal sanction. Even artificial comedy grew out of the prevalence of artificial manner. Dramatic form has in turn been moulded to receive the content, and has been changed as the content was changed; this is best seen in a comparison of "Œdipus" with Ibsen's "Ghosts." The dramatic treatment of the mysteries of life, as they react upon the individual, has been modified in accordance with the highest individual action toward those very mysteries. Hence the progress from the Greek idea of Fate, to the metaphysical concern for the individual soul, to the modern conception of heredity — almost as inexorable as Fate — and finally to the collectivist concern for social regeneration, which seems to be the color of American drama.

It makes no difference how you approach the drama — whether from its physical, its technical, or its economic side — the crowd is always concerned, and very largely determines, through public opinion, the dramatist's tendency, even as he, if he be big enough, reinforces or determines the crowd's cast of thought.

In the opening pages of his book on "Social Forces in German Literature," Professor Kuno Francke writes:

"The fundamental conception which underlies the following account . . . is that of a continued struggle between individualistic and collectivistic tendencies, between man and society, between personality and tradition, between liberty and unity, between cosmopolitanism and nationality — a struggle which may be said to be the prime motive power of all human progress."

Undoubtedly, from such a conflict we are certain of obtaining a moving literature as well as a contemplative one. Through it, there is the dramatic impulse, the theatrical

clash, the life force — on the one hand seeing intensely, on the other dreaming truly; and who knows but the time is now at hand in America when this social impulse shall again lead to our prophesying boldly?

In all that pertains to the greatest literature, dramatic or otherwise, the one tremendous law of life is that it must flow through us, purging the soul of its impurities, even though in doing so it deal with the impure, for the purpose of correcting evil. Modern social drama, as represented by Ibsen, Hauptmann, and Sudermann, with their less inevitable follower, Pinero, is full of such atmosphere.

Let it be granted, before the argument as to social forces is stated, that drama is something to be played before people, and hence is something to move people. This is one of its essential characteristics, one of its chief marks of distinction in comparison with other species of forceful literature. We also grant, echoing Freytag, Price, and others, who in turn but faintly echo Aristotle, that drama is reflective of life, and is necessarily influenced by the intellectual, social, and economic environment of the dramatist, even though the subject-matter be foreign to the time in which the dramatist lived. Throughout Shakespeare, whether he be dealing with the Cæsars, with the Capulets, or with the Danes, the Elizabethan is always nigh. No man in any walk of life may escape his age. Even the iconoclasts are in advance of theirs as a reaction against it; or as Emerson claims, every social reform was once a private opinion.

Again, it is wise to grant in drama as in life that conflict means clash of will. The heroic marionettes interpret this as a clash of physical bodies, due to unbridled physical passion outwardly made manifest. The humanistic drama regards it in a deeper, a more intensive sense. This clash involves philosophical distinction, and is nowhere better exemplified than in the progress of Maeterlinck, whose con-

ception of Destiny has altered to accord with his later belief that human will may sometimes control the working of Fate. We now recognize nothing as wholly inevitable that comes from our own life-force. Destiny has changed into a Christian principle that as we sow, so shall we reap. "We are masters of our Fate," sings Henley. We destroy only that we may build better upon our mistake, or, as Shaw says: "Every step in morals is made by challenging the validity of the existing conception of perfect propriety in conduct."

The drama, therefore, depends upon social support; it has to talk of life in terms of life, and it has to appeal to life in matters with which life is concerned. Even before nationality in drama added characteristics which distinguished the British from the French or Germans, and differentiated the Americans as separate, even though a part of the English, the drama echoed the fundamental principles of life, and dealt specifically with the vital energy which surged through man's blood.

Of course, even to-day, the vital literature at its most vital moments transcends nationality, though not rejecting it. Ibsen in Scandinavia, Hauptmann and Sudermann in Germany, Tolstoy in Russia, Shaw in England, are all swept by the same social movement which tends toward partial social solution, even though the methods of using it are surprisingly uncomfortable for those of us who are willing, as *Vockerat* says in Hauptmann's "Lonely Lives," to be "the drones in the hive." To the big dramatist, to the true citizen, the happy ending in drama is one that satisfies only when it cleanses and leaves the soul in the light of truth.

The drama as a social force — apart from its primary object to have and to hold the interest of a crowd through the essential factor of its story — has resulted in a species

of play which, for want of a better term, has been designated "the social drama." It is really a drama of condition, social or economic. All critics recognize it as a definite species: Shaw in his prefaces, Henry Arthur Jones, Walkley, W. P. Eaton, and Clayton Hamilton distinguish it as a form in which the message is carried direct; in which conviction is being hurled at the people, regardless of sensibilities and regardless of whether the immediate crowd heed or not. But the dramatist who disregards the crowd is no real man of the theatre; he will find it difficult to have his philosophy — social, economic, or spiritual — accepted across the foot-lights. And truly, as Mr. Hamilton has stated in his suggestive book on "The Theory of the Theatre," the dramatist under these conditions might as well be a novelist; he would be heeded much more readily. Drama will not abide long exposition, such as one finds in the plays of Paul Bourget and in the last act of Augustus Thomas's "As a Man Thinks."

We grant, therefore, that no man may escape his time, and least so the man of the theatre; the current of life carries him with it. After summarizing Sudermann's "Heimat," and calling it a "literary thundercloud," Professor Francke describes modern Germany in this manner:

"On the one hand, Bismarck, whether in office or out; on the other, Bebel. On the one hand, the ruling minority, wonderfully organized, full of intellectual and moral vigor, proud, honest, loyal, patriotic but hemmed in by prejudice, and devoid of larger sympathies; on the other, the millions of the majority, equally well organized, influential as a political body, but socially held down, restless, rebellious, inspired with the vague idea of a broader and fuller humanity. On the one hand, a past secure in glorious achievements; on the other, a future teeming with extravagant hopes. On the one hand, service; on the other, personality. On the one hand, an almost religious belief in the sacredness of hered-

itary sovereignty; on the other, an equally fervent zeal for the emancipation of all, both conservatives and radicals, both monarchists and social democrats, inevitably drifting toward the same final goal of a new corporate consciousness, which shall embrace both authority and freedom."

Now, this summary includes the whole significance of social forces, though it only examines the political and historical aspects of the subject. There is no doubt that drama also finds itself reflecting the same aspects, but more is involved in the play by the very essence of its nature. History, philosophy, sociology, and economics deal with the effects of social, economic, historical, and philosophical action. Drama deals directly with those forces dominantly in action; it designates this person as against that, this condition as against that. One principle opposed to another results only in philosophical speculation; it is neither life nor drama.

Condition, after all, has a double effect. It not only colors the play by keeping the playwright within the pale of vital interests, but it likewise prompts the dramatist to incorporate therein that part of himself which is in rebellion against existing condition. He exerts his art for three reasons: to express himself, either inspirationally or consciously; to convince others of the presence of social evil in a community, showing them at the same time the means of social betterment; and finally, to develop character in relation to the conditions of which he treats. It is always necessary to keep drama close to life, — a drama which not only draws from life, but which in turn reacts on life itself.

This has made the writer of social drama intense, — perhaps more absorbed than he should be in the beclouded atmosphere which he strives to clear. The time has come when we are beginning to see that the social dramatist's vision has been too persistent in its view of evil. Life is not

one continual shady past, and Eugene Walter's "The Easiest Way," poignant in its theme, is neither healthy in its solution nor agreeable in its situations. Everyone will grant that even Ibsen, toward the close of his career, came to see wherein he had robbed himself of the sweetness of life by the persistent dwelling upon the canker-worm; he even began to sneer at himself after having burned his soul with the red-hot terror of "Ghosts." The idealist in "The Wild Duck," who wrecks the conventional ideal happiness of others, is only the cartoon of himself. Yet what larger social force in modern drama than Ibsen — revolutionizing technique and showing how to vitalize the commonplace incidents of life! His social significance has been individual as well as communal; and, curiously, though he disclaimed any effort on his part to be a champion of women, his contemplation was fixed on the feminine half of society which needed to be free in order that civic life, and all civic institutions pledged to the perpetuation of civic life, might be free. This is the essential moral purpose of all social drama.

There are other ways of remedying society than by treating solely of conditions as they are. The realist has done a deal of good by his so-called "muck-raking," but there is likewise a necessary benefit to be conferred by "star-gazing." Let us grant that only by respecting the rights of others will a man respect himself. If he cannot regard the laws of cities, let him have a care for the laws of nature. If he cannot be the frock-coat citizen — and assuredly the pillars of society need reinforcing some time — let him at least be a man, not dependent on the dictates of his passion only.

Condition is simply the back-drop of life; man's soul and woman's soul are the prime considerations. The horizon may be dimmed by factory smoke, but while the "muck-raker" is attempting to clear the atmosphere of condition, there is no need to allow the soul to be smirched with black.



And when we speak of the horrors of tenement condition in America, there is likewise another picture of epic breadth we may hold in mind — the vast wheat fields of the West under the open sky calling for labor, which either does not or will not hear. We can draw from American life the feeling that, however economically oppressed, in truth we are masters of our fate.

As a social force, drama necessarily must be in touch with the sympathies of those with whom it comes in closest contact. The foreigner who brings to America a French play wholly concerned with the problems of family life as the Gallic spirit conceives it, will find the American superficially attracted. There must be a touch of sympathy with condition in drama, as well as with human passion. We found "*Les Affaires sont les Affaires*" ("*Business is Business*") of poignant interest because its business strain was in accord with Wall Street. Londoners could find nothing in the problem of "*The Lion and the Mouse*" — aside from its faulty logic — for the simple reason that to British audiences the Standard Oil history is simply a history and not a condition confronting the Empire.

In this consideration of social forces — and no playwright may disregard them — there are certain distinguishing features of American life which may some day find unified expression in a native theatre. We are being affected by European drama to the extent that we are learning to make use of the deep and vital problems of human nature, and to exalt them above the mere effectiveness of situation; we are being taught that there are intimate social relations which we are too prone to take for granted without determining for ourselves the exact foundations on which they are based; we are learning technique from the European writers of social plays, and need not be ashamed of the well-made dramas by Augustus Thomas and William Gillette. Finally, we are

beginning to see that the world-movement is touching our own shores, and is demanding of us the solution of problems much the same as those confronting every nation of the earth. What we, as a civic body, may say is this: Let us solve the problems according to our national strength, and according to the moral point of view upon which we have agreed to live as a nation.

The call of revolt in drama is not anarchy, and we in America have not quite realized its meaning. But we are intellectually alive to its presence. And in order to gain strength we must feel in the soil, the common clay, for the vital force which has yielded us more grain than our labor is able to garner, but which has not yet yielded us a full harvest of art and idealism. What now has to be determined by our American dramatist is: how may he so combine what is being learned from Ibsen on the one hand, and from Maeterlinck on the other, as to create out of the workman, the plowman, the laborer in the field, the artisan, a poet as well as an ordinary man?

Yet we need not hesitate, for we perforce must seek in condition, in the tang of our soil, for American drama. It is useless to think that we may transplant something foreign to our natures, and that it will flourish. We must meet life in our own way, and not have it met for us by others in their foreign way. Still, the value of social drama lies in the impulse it gives to our dramatists to depend on other than newspaper knowledge for condition and for human nature. Social forces lie deep; they are not on the surface; they are the true history of any movement. Hence, it is not cleverness, but understanding, they require for their full and ample explanation.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ESSENTIALS OF AN AMERICAN PLAY

#### I

WE hear much about the American dramatist; we are always denying him, and at the next turn we are discovering him. Some critics proclaimed with much assurance that William Vaughn Moody had reached the goal in "The Great Divide," but it was only notable in its suggestion of largeness; some others, lost in the admiration of literary values, declare that Percy Mackaye's "Sappho and Phaon" was great drama and that his "Mater" adequately discussed the problems of democracy. But these declarations are futile, and have only relative significance. Either a dramatist has, or he has not, written a play with some telling substance in it. That is the primary test of the theatre — the test that knows no nationality.

Henry Arthur Jones is spoken of as an English dramatist — first, because that language is his vehicle of expression. Bronson Howard, Clyde Fitch, and David Belasco likewise use this medium — and in such a sense American drama is but a subdivision of the English drama. However, Mr. Jones is a British dramatist because of something fundamentally deeper. Spiritually, mentally, socially, he has been subject to national characteristics, he has been trained in an English environment, he has been educated in English institutions. It would have been as impossible for him to conceive the theme of "The Lion and the Mouse," as it

would have been for Charles Klein to have written it on his first arrival in America.

A dramatist's point of view must be shaped by the body politic in which he lives. The interests and local distinctions of any nationality are reflected in its literature, and the essentials of an American play should reflect the essentials of American life — not in the philosophic sense, but in the broader and more human sense.

We are free in our use of the term, "American drama;" we are even freer in our hasty assertions that no distinctively American drama exists; and, what is more to the point, we find it difficult to define what is exactly the dominant note that stamps a play as American. Let us attempt to define, in order, the two terms in this cant phrase, "American drama."

Consult the American dramatists of all grades of distinction, and their opinions scarcely vary. Bronson Howard, the Dean, once said: "By the term I should mean any play that is written by an American, or in America by a foreign resident, that is produced here, and that deals with any subject — using America in the sense of the United States. The phrase, American drama, if extended to a full description, would be 'Plays written in the United States, chiefly in the English language.'" As to general characteristics, Mr. Howard recognized none as distinctive of this country alone, thereby inferring that humanity is universal, whether garbed in a cowpuncher's outfit or in a king's uniform. But Hamlin Garland's claim that it is locality which marks nations, and Bret Harte's exemplification of that fact, lead one to agree with the terseness of Augustus Thomas' opinion that the American drama is written by Americans upon American subjects, and is stamped with peculiar humor and distinct character-drawing. Such requisites even give rise to sectional literature of a kind that distinguishes W. D. Howells



EDWIN MILTON ROYLE



from Thomas Nelson Page, or Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman from Charles Egbert Craddock. Elsewhere Mr. Thomas has asserted, "There are very few good lines in a play that go to waste, and with their general acceptance as good, there is little disposition to regard the nationality of the author. A good line by anybody secures immediate recognition by any audience of understanding." Herein, however, we detect an element of weakness in Augustus Thomas, as a playwright, for in many of his plays on the order of "De Lancy," "Mrs. Leffingwell's Boots," and "The Other Girl," wit and sharp lines predominate in lieu of any strong idea.

Harry B. Smith, writer of many comic opera librettos, places rigorous requirement upon American drama. "I do not think we have an American drama," he writes, "in the sense that there is a French drama or an English drama. Our plays are clever, run a season or two, and then are relegated to the top shelf. There will be no American drama until plays are written that endure, and take their place in the body of literature."

It is the "square deal" that American audiences mostly seek, such a spirit as made Milton Royle's "The Squaw Man" a popular success. The large heart rather than the subtle one, the direct deed rather than the evasive thought, and the terse answer rather than the veiled meaning, compel sympathetic interest in an American crowd. Most of our dramatists have learned this directness through newspaper work. Howard, Thomas, and Ade began as reporters.

This quality of "uplift," therefore, is synonymous with the word "American." To be an American means to have an indisputable right to rise above environment. Democracy knows but one level, and that is the equity of justice; democracy gives out the great privilege of drawing no distinctions and of raising no barriers, save those that are made by differences of character. The American is placed upon

the highroad of life, and there comes to him, in the face of Fate, the American note: "It's up to you." There it is in a nutshell, and in the popular language. This is the distinctive character of the literature we are seeking and of the drama which we hope to have.

The American is clean and healthy; to him the home means a great deal. His temper is quick to renounce abandon, despite all we hear of the divorce courts at Reno; his directness is not sympathetic toward what the faddist is pleased to call subtlety. The dominant feature of American character is action; hence it must be the essential requisite of American, as it is of all, drama.

The indisputable right to rise above environment — is that our fundamental note? It excludes the idea of tragedy as the Greeks conceived it, and indeed we are not deeply moved by the inevitable of Sophocles. Someone has written:

"In defeat, the American sows the seeds of victory; . . . for there is no event, not the worst, but God is of and in it. And for *Ædipus* in his remorse, and *Oswald* in his imbecility, there is infinite certainty of good. . . . Paradoxical as it is, the fact is clear that, in the heart of a Georgia mob, in Whittier's verse, and in the cowpuncher's respect for a woman, there lives the same spirit whose largeness and delicacy, whose tenderness and unconquerable daring, made American life the most vital in the world."

We applaud this nobleness of attitude, wheresoever it is to be found; we claim it as our own. There is an epic strength to the fight — a force that will come, it may be, with the sweep of melodrama, but healthfully active. In "The Virginian," Owen Wister says:

"All America is divided into two classes — the quality and the equality. The latter will always recognize the former when mistaken for it. Both will be with us until our women bear nothing but kings.



"It was through the Declaration of Independence that we Americans acknowledged the *eternal inequality* of man, for we abolished a cut-and-dried aristocracy. We had seen little men artificially held up in high places, and great men artificially held down in low places, and our own justice-loving hearts abhorred this violence to human nature. Therefore we decreed that every man should thenceforth have equal liberty to find his own level. By this very decree we acknowledged and gave freedom to true aristocracy, saying 'Let the best man win, whoever he is.' Let the best man win! That is America's word. That is true democracy."

The strength of our American life lies in a marked companionship of the American people. We like evidences of this fact in our books; we applaud it on our stage. This is why "The Virginian," poor as it was in its dramatized form, drew, for reason of its quiet dignity of conception, its quick decision, and its elemental passion.

Speaking of his hero and heroine in "The Gentleman from Indiana," which failed in its dramatization, Booth Tarkington writes: "The genius of the American is adaptability, and both were sprung from pioneers whose mean life depended on that quality." But in this momentary acceptance of inherited environment lies the infinite source of action. Later on in the narrative, there runs through the hero's mind a definition of success: "To accept the worst that Fate can deal, and to wring courage from it instead of despair." This is the dominant note in our American life, and we seek it in our drama.

There is a speech in "Strongheart," a sincere and vigorous, if not a vital, play by William C. DeMille, where an Indian has to forsake his love of a white girl, because he is a red man; yet in his strength of sentiment he claims his infinite right as a man. "You have taken the land of my fathers,"

he cries, "yet when I live by your laws, you will not call me brother. I am the son of a chief. In what way am I not your equal? You would take from me my pride and my love. Do you think you can take these without a struggle? . . . You called me from among my mountains to be one of you. I was happy there. You showed me the great life beyond and now you bid me keep back! You tell me that I may not share it, but must stand outside, because I am an Indian. No, — I will not do it."

Then in the end, *Billy*, the typical American college boy, sees *Strongheart* alone in his grief and goes to him. This dialogue follows:

*Billy*: What 's up between you and the boys?

*Strong.*: The prejudice of centuries.

*Billy*: Is that straight?

*Strong.*: Yes.

*Billy*: Then I'm ashamed of my whole race, and I'll go and tell 'em so.

An audience applauds such unstinted generosity; it has a laugh of jubilation in it; it gives a reportorial comment, and an incisive, spontaneous, youthful judgment. It comes from a good heart, and is the verdict of man for man.

The indisputable right to rise above environment.— here is the source for large action, and it demands, in technique, a quick grasp of essentials.

"I'm a business man, Miss Dearborn," explains *Curtis Jadwin* in Channing Pollock's dramatization of Frank Norris's "The Pit." "It does n't take me long to discover what I want, and, when I find that thing, I generally get it. I want you to marry me."

This is not our customary way of showing sentiment, but there is an activity in it typical of American life. It reveals a defiance of petty convention and of cloaked meaning. Our problem has largely been in the direction of stress



CHANNING POLLOCK



and strain. Yet *Jadwin*, the typical business speculator on Wall Street, is made to exclaim:

"Oh, it's not the money, Laura; it never was. It was the excitement. I had to do something. I could n't sit around and twiddle my thumbs. I don't believe in lounging around clubs, or playing the race, or murdering game birds, or running some poor, helpless fox to death."

Here one detects an essential contrast between English and American life. We have no recognized type of the gay *Lord Quex* class; we do not believe in the decadence that grows from worse to worse. Because for two generations a man's ancestors may not have been all that they should have been, the present holds an infinity of reward in store for him who has the strength to fight character, tradition, or condition, in the light of truth. It is ever the cry of energy, and the gleam of hope in a nature never beyond the point of redemption.

In Richard Harding Davis's "Soldiers of Fortune" — a success as far as popular dramatization was concerned — *Clay*, the hero, says to the society *Langham* girl, who has taunted him with being content to labor:

"No, . . . I don't amount to much, but, my God! . . . when you think what I was. . . . If I wished it, I could drop this active work to-morrow, and continue as an adviser — as an expert — but I like the active part better. I like doing things myself. . . . It's better to bind a laurel to the plow than to call yourself hard names."

The continental importations that come to us have nothing of this ethical ring to them; they are teaching us the possibilities that enter life, spiritually, socially, and economically; they are warning us, by their realistic discussion, against the part of life that flaunts degradation. That book is liked the best in America, that play is applauded the most, which gives a human soul the right of way to find its own salvation.

The American tragedy is one of incompetence, — a lack of individual character, and not of constitutional weakness or of national depravity.

## II

There is more than the mere defining of American drama as something written by a native or a foreigner, resident in America. There is even something more than the fact that we are moved and prompted by events that confront us in our social, political, industrial, and commercial relations. Though immediate events may not be permanent, they are at least significant, and drama should always deal with significant moments, motives, or situations. The stage is denied the right of emphasizing the existence of little moments. Ibsen may seem to have done this, but his dramas usually start at high speed, and advance by compressed thought and essential dialogue.

To define American drama, it is as paramount that we understand the essentials of drama in general, as that we gauge the meaning of the word "American." History would justify our differentiating drama from the mass of literature by the very fact that the stage is the ultimate means by which the dramatic writer intends to reach his public. I am inclined to believe that drama is emphasized as a special branch of literature primarily because the story is to be shown in the active concrete, rather than told in the passive or *static* — and that of necessity the word *drama* carries with it the ideas and considerations of dramatist, actor, audience, and stage.

Dramatic form does not always constitute drama, though it may claim to mean literature. Tennyson failed signally as a playwright — despite the support of Henry Irving; Browning likewise failed — despite the encouragement of Macready

— because the mind's eye saw what could not be visibly depicted; because genius *pondered* where progressive action should have carried forward the story to the end. But when we obtain, in lieu, the poetry of a Tennyson or of a Browning — even, in some respects, of a Stephen Phillips — we can afford to lose the playwright. Yet we cannot see where the fact of poetry should be an excuse for failure as playwright, if the poet aims for the stage.

In America, we have the poetic drama, but it neither controls the stage nor does it bear evidence of native strength. "Judith of Bethulia," by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, was a slow-moving tragedy, a mixture of *Lady Macbeth* and studied history; it was devoid of spontaneous imagination, and the action was embroidered in words. Josephine Preston Peabody (Mrs. Lionel Marks) in her "Marlowe" or "The Piper," Percy Mackaye in "A Garland to Sylvia," or "Sappho and Phaon," Ridgely Torrence in "Abelard and Heloise," Olive Dargan in "Lords and Lovers" — all of them have courted form alone, ignoring the dynamics of the stage, or the exigencies of the scene. These plays are better fitted for the closet.

A reading public and a theatre public differ in this: that what the reader loses he may regain by turning back, but what the audience misses is wholly lost, unless, by chance, repetition brings it further on in the development of the plot. American drama is not as yet sufficiently compact in structure to satisfy both the stage and literature.

We often hear it said that drama is a reflex of life; hence, that American drama is a reflex of American life. This is but another way of asserting that drama is action, since life is action; that drama is imitation, since reflex means reflection; and that action is not an end in itself, but is definitely directed towards a goal, since life is full of purpose. Drama, if it means directed action, must of necessity call in

the exercise of the human will, and where will is required, there is involved the compensating element of opposition.

Therefore, a definition of drama should state that it is action directed toward an end; that it is the exertion of human will stimulated by some large emotional or mental view; that it is struggle, whether against environment or the individual — a struggle against Destiny or heredity or will.

There is a moment, however, when events, moved by contending emotions, push action to its highest pitch. The tide therefrom begins to ebb, to adjust or resolve itself. Were we to express this progress by a curve of development, our climax would be the crest of the wave, with the line of descent sharper than that of ascent, yet governed in its direction through every point of the curve from its beginning. Francisque Sarcey used the admirable term *scènes à faire*, which indicates the organic consistency with which this curve of drama is drawn. For if the playwright has clearly conceived the central plan of his play, and has definitely fashioned in his mind the characteristics of his chief *dramatis personæ*, there are some scenes which enter his calculations whether he will or not, which are essential to the understanding of the story and to the development of the central figures.

Sometimes our American dramatist blinds himself to this necessary consistency, since it demands rigorous workmanship and clear ideas; sometimes he is unable to cope with such close, logical technique. This is true of most attempts to convert novels into dialogue for the stage; the effort is to externalize the important scenes in the book, which may-hap have been blue-pencilled by the manager or his reader as the situations most desired for a commercial success; or those extrances and exits are selected that will best suit the limitations of a particular actor.

In view of the fact that drama has, throughout its history, been written *for* the stage, a definition should include certain



expression of the truth that drama is intended for representation. Theory will never make the dramatist; a few principles will not construct a play. Shakespeare knew his playhouse; Sophocles recognized the helpfulness of scenery; every world-renowned dramatist has been brought into close relation with the theatrics of his profession. And though there are conventions for every age, conventions which modify the form and affect the physical outlines of the theatre itself, from the playhouse of Shakespeare and Molière to that of Clyde Fitch and Augustus Thomas, the dynamic quality of drama remains constant. It must appeal to the crowd. This is as unfailing in exaction for the American dramatist as it was for the ancient Greek.

Fine distinctions can never be rigorously formulated and applied to drama. We cannot go to the theatre with a head full of principles, and attempt to base every turn of emotion, every technicality of structure, upon an axiom or a psychological formula from a theatrical text-book. The point cannot be sharply defined where comedy flows into tragedy, or where tragedy fades into comedy, even though the distinctions made by Aristotle in the "Poetics" are clear in mind.

Hence, in our pliable definition of drama, we may consider the form and substance to be *the imitation of a particular action which should be accounted for from its beginning to its end, in a style consistent with its emotional color, and which is destined, through the medium of the artist, to awaken in others a feeling of sympathy or repulsion.* In the phrase, "emotional color," we have the motive of the dramatist, prompting him to write the play; the motive of the manager in selecting the play for his theatre; and the motives of the audiences in coming. The emotional value awakens the desire; it is the awakening that determines the moral, the educative effect of drama in a community.

Perhaps this may sound speculative, yet it involves the practical elements at the basis of the theatre. So far, we may say that all modern drama can be judged by these elements. But such a definition as we have here constructed only affords us a framework upon which to trace the pattern of a national art, as well as of an art in general. Dramatic history indicates that America and England have practically come under the same dramatic influences; it will reveal the fact that while in London, Robertson and Boucicault and Clement Scott were making a livelihood by filching French plays and infusing English sentiment into them, New York was being subject to the same thing under the régime of Augustin Daly.

The American playwright, in view of this situation, had for a long while to fight against managerial prejudice which was in favor of the foreign market. The general rule was that American successes were practically successes of English dramatists. This distrust of native talent was to be deplored, but it was well grounded. For, in America, technical training was not particular at the outset. Our young playwrights mistook curiosity for interest, noise for action, and relied for effect on variety rather than on consistency, on external antics of the *dramatis personæ* rather than on outward action as governed by mental state or social condition. America is so large, territorially, that we seek for sectional types and details of life, while in England the dramatic author pays more attention to unity of conception and technique — a unity that will sacrifice artifice, however effective, for the sake of truth. But it is usually English truth.

There are very definite reasons why Bronson Howard is rightfully considered the Dean of American Drama — a rightful title according to seniority, but more especially because of his fight in the seventies and eighties for American interests in American drama for the American people. Not

that drama of any kind, if it fulfill the requirements of drama, will fail to grip us wherever we are, but as citizens of a body politic we have our separate interests to consider.

Americans, as we have suggested, are characterized by their directness; they are quick, decisive, and almost blunt in conversation; they are practically imaginative at the present, and that is why their inventions fill the market. Their emotions are large, and their sympathies are easily appealed to. The controlling factor in their make-up is a sense of humor — not so subtle as the English, but more good-humored. Daniel Frohman once said that the Germans talked their plays, while the Americans acted theirs. This is another essential of drama: constant movement — a characteristic which is typical of American life.

The difference between British and American drama is the difference between the London *Times* and the New York *Herald*. What we find in our morning paper, we are most apt to find again in our evening play. The life of the West is the melodrama of the East. These seemingly facetious statements are not far from the truth. Yet there can be found no definite tendency in American drama of the present, for the simple reason that there is no well-defined philosophy of American life. We have just waked up to the fact that in our own country, richness of humanity is as plentiful as elsewhere. We draw from our history, especially from the Civil War period, but have not sufficiently penetrated the social life of these vital times to create any permanent historical drama. James A. Herne's "Griffith Davenport" — the only manuscript of which was burned in a fire which totally destroyed the family homestead, "Herne Oaks," — was the finest example of a war play treated in spirit, rather than in martial action. Clyde Fitch's "Barbara Frietchie" may be termed a quasi-war play only; William Gillette's "Secret Service," well constructed and

atmospheric, is superior to Bronson Howard's "Shenandoah" both in verity and in story interest; Belasco's "The Heart of Maryland" is more melodramatically striking than William DeMille's "The Warrens of Virginia." Yet all of these fail to grasp the essential conditions of the period.

In our literary deluge of the past and present, we are able to point only to a few products that have etched deep upon the page the very fibre of national and sectional life. I always like to mention as being in the same class, Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter," Frank Norris's "The Octopus," James Lane Allen's "The Reign of Law," and Ellen Glasgow's "The Deliverance." Each one of these deals with something psychologically large; each impresses us with the undoubted fact that the situations, as well as the spiritual and physical development of the characters, are dependent on the soil which nurtured them. We have not as yet produced drama of this character. William Vaughn Moody's "The Great Divide," effective though it proved to be theatrically, was a false imitation of the method.

There is in this country a deep interest in the drama of condition. But in satisfying this interest, the playwright must see that he does not lose grip on the essentials of all drama. He must view action from its logical outcome to its logical conclusion. However local he is, the underlying force must be a motive that is human, that knows no local restriction.

Thus, the essentials of an American play are subject to most of the conditions which apply to the development of English, French, or German drama. But temperament is colored in subtle manner; heredity plays a part; tradition, environment, mental training, spiritual guidance, social demands, — all leave their impress upon individual life, hence, upon the individual dramatist. There undoubtedly is such a thing as American citizenship, apart from its



*Photo. by Dr. H. C. Wood*

WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY



political significance. The essential factor, therefore, is to determine whether or not the artisan is a true playwright; whether he understands drama, or whether he has a false idea of its organic character. To obtain the best out of dramatic condition, we must create a body of dramatic criticism strong enough to establish a wholesome attitude toward our amusement. For in our desire to create a national dramatic literature, we must not forget that it is far more important to be true to life than to be true to locality. If the dramatist, of whatever country, view life deeply, sincerely, and fully, his background will of its own accord assume its proper position in the picture. And he will more assuredly find himself the author of a successful play.

### III

The spirit of unrest is not only evident in social matters, but in our amusements as well. We are playing with public taste without any aim to our guns, and out of this has come only novelty. What we need is the establishment of a school of playwrights, prompted by some large impetus. If there be originality at all on our American stage, it comes to us from abroad, and is colored by foreign ideals. The motive power of drama to-day is not native born; we in America follow and imitate, or we try to counteract the moral tenses of continental drama by the gaiety and glitter of musical comedy.

It cannot be expected that our stage would be the first to offer what our American literature has scarcely supplied — a body of ideas sufficiently strong to incite or to modify public opinion, as Galsworthy's "Justice" wakened England. One cannot refrain from saying that, apart from a small number of American dramatists, most of those authors writing for the stage are prompted by nothing more impelling

than the tempting royalty returns. That is why novelists wrongly whip themselves into dramatists. They are alive to sensation as the reporter is alive, and curiously they lose their literary sense of values. They are keen after a story, but the narrative quality is not much above that of the average ten-cent magazine. Though they would be the first to disclaim it, they are nothing more than melodramatists, not in the exaggerated sense of Eighth Avenue, but in the realistic sense of the modern novel.

Since this is the condition, since theatrical business is increasing without a corresponding increase in the authority of the playwright, we may, with some reason, despair of public taste as it concerns the stage. Where are we tending in our home product, aided or injured, as you will, by the commercial theatre? For, strange to say, though our women's clubs throughout the country are actively studying modern drama as a product of social and intellectual forces, they are not able to apply the ideas of Sudermann or Hauptmann to their own experience, save in so far as the plays are sexual.

This is unhealthy; it detaches the theatre from its ethical purpose; it attempts to force condition to adapt itself to an imported morality. In some respects we cannot call it a wrong morality; in other respects we know it is harmful and abnormal. Most of our dramatic hysteria is a result of this detached appreciation of problems that do not concern us, since they come under the jurisdiction of a different social law. We Americans can never fully understand the Gallic spirit for this reason. Emerson and Maeterlinck are of the same spiritual piece, but Maeterlinck came from Emerson. Our adjustment of family life is so different from that of the French that Bourget seems wholly inadequate, so far as general impress is concerned. So it was with Ibsen when he was a "fad," for only our New England women



could quite know the terrors of a social conscience, and only our farmers' wives and daughters could be said to resemble in their brooding some of Ibsen's heroines.

What I wish to emphasize is that at the present time there is no absolute force moulding our theatre into distinct form or purpose, or directing either the actor, the playwright, or the public. When we are serious, then we become imitators, and grow excessive in our desire to be thought extreme and powerful. A system of philosophy does not follow from reflected light; a *Magda* cannot be evolved from an atmosphere in no way warm to receive her.

We are splashing around in a rich sea of American humanity, and we do not know how to swim with the strong current. We either look across the water where they are really creating a body of ideas for the stage, or else we turn back as Carleton did in "Memnon," as Conrad did in "Jack Cade," or as Boker did in nearly all of his dramas, to history, romance and myth. If we mention American history, we stop just at the point where we should begin. Condition is only one phase of native character; it has, nevertheless, so far modified human action as to stamp the American with outward and evident characteristics. This is seen in Frank Norris's novels, and in the sectional literary differences between the North and the South. Newspaper condition, *i. e.*, as the American newspaper sees American condition, is the one original note in our theatre.

But it is not so original as it is familiar and near to our own experience. That is the one hope of the mediocre activity of the American playwright. There is more verse being written in this country than ever before, but it is not poetry. Yet the increase in jingle poets at least indicates a poetic tendency. So is it with drama; we are writing plays everywhere, but even as the inexperienced poet wrote verses to a nightingale, which is never seen in America save at a public

aviary, so the playwright seeks everywhere but in himself for the material he wishes.

There was a time when Schiller and Kotzebue influenced the American stage; there was another time when Scribe, Hugo, and Dumas became the models. Then there arrived Wallack and Daly, who, as theatrical managers, did no jot of service to the American playwright, until Bronson Howard, the Dean of our American dramatists, insisted upon being measured on his own merits. Yet, American though he was in interest and intention, Mr. Howard was saturated with French technique, and with French problems of infidelity.

I know of no American drama, based on imitation, that has not failed in both respects — to be American and to be drama. And the reason why we lack direction is that while we have had political crises, social upheavals, and economic laws, we have never, save in the days of extreme Puritanism, had spiritual struggle.

American life is identified with outward show and sign; in that respect we have American drama. All of our institutions are figuring on the stage: Charles Klein periodically and in superficial manner, muck-rakes a corporation. That is sheer journalism. There must be something within a man so firmly connected with his soil — not with his nationality — that if it were severed, all the life-blood of his conviction would turn anæmic. We lack conviction, we *are* anæmic on our stage, and it were well to seek a remedy.

In England, there is a school of drama which attempts to supply a stage play, measured according to literary standards; in Ireland, there is evident an impulse which may result also in a powerful and distinctive school. But usually a type of dramatic expression comes from the workshop of one man, individualistic enough in his message, alive enough in his intentness, to override the limitation of his culture.

and to be affected by his contemporaries or by his reading. Ibsen lured, as the *Rat-Wife* lured *Eyolf*, and everyone mistook his realism for an abortion, when, in reality, it was strong with moral and social purpose. Both he and Tolstoy strove for good, honest ends — the one thoroughly consistent, the other contradictory; and both victims of their own self-scourging.

Not one of our little writers for the theatre to-day has that set purpose, that moral steadfastness. For our drama does not come from within. It is something tangible; it is raw life-stuff (our great hope) needing the craftsman and the seer.

#### IV

It may almost be stated as an aphorism that the critical faculty is usually in advance of the creative faculty. Whatever a man does, as exemplification of his theory, is never an exact illustration of it; there is always a rift in the armor of accomplishment. So it is that we find Ibsen's realism falling at times into well-planned theatricalism; Maeterlinck's *static* drama giving way to the full-blooded passion of "Monna Vanna;" Shaw's prefaces surpassing his plays in truth and application; Jones' "Renaissance of the English Drama" a clearer arraignment of English conventions than any of his dramas.

This means that the critical faculty prepares the way, and whenever a dramatist wishes to clear his mind of obscurity, he falls into expressions of opinion which usually take form in lectures, talks, or interviews. Only last May, Brioux delivered himself of a long discourse before the Académie Française, not upon technique which marks such a piece as "Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont," but upon the tenderness of "L'Abbe Constantin" and its romantic author. Not that a dramatist repudiates his theories, his tastes, his

critical aim, when he comes to write, but his critical purpose has to be made subservient to the essential purpose of the theatre.

I have often thought how healthy, how almost juvenile the American dramatist is in his appreciation of external opportunities; how willing he is to set himself any difficult mechanical task for accomplishment on the stage. David Belasco is such a craftsman. But with this creative exuberance has arisen the need for analyzing what this big American life really means for stage purposes, how it may be used so as to represent the storm and stress of material growth, without destroying the idealism which is the heritage of every nation, and more especially a young one. Many playwrights have expressed their views to me, and each one of them has advanced beyond his practice and has preached excellently well.

I always found Bronson Howard to be twice the American as man that he was as playwright. "One of Our Girls," "Saratoga," "Kate," are all French moulds containing stray flecks of native dialogue. From what I know of New York society drama at the time they were written, this was the entertainment most acceptable to the theatre public. But their spirit was hardly as Mr. Howard felt personally about American drama — how it should deal specifically with American conditions and with American types.

Of all our dramatists, James A. Herne may be said to have come nearest to the soil, doing as much for the theatre as ever W. D. Howells has done for literature. Yet, after he had tried some keen-edged realism in "Margaret Fleming" and some evenly-balanced history in "Griffith Davenport," he was obliged to compromise with his public, and to encase his simple motives and his poignantly simple emotions in a melodramatic setting. But even then he did not forsake his critical theory; he held to the natural method of dialogue,

hewing out of native character what later and lesser dramatists hewed out of a half-understanding of Ibsen. It is a strange instance, this, of Mr. Herne's sensing Ibsen before his day. Yet, though in a way he could not practice what he preached, James A. Herne continued to preach, and his statements in lectures and interviews are in advance of his actual stage work. And his distinctions were always unerringly ethical. "If a disagreeable truth," he wrote, "is not also an essential, it should never be used in art." Mr. Herne realized certain didactic touches in "Margaret Fleming," but he felt his manner of characterization was right. It was simply ahead of its time, and only the critical outlook can travel so far. That is why "Shore Acres" followed rather than preceded "Margaret Fleming."

Now, there is one essential our American dramatist has fully realized — that the stage must have action and depict a human story. From American life he has learned the one, since its chief characteristic is movement; and from the American newspaper he has gleaned the other, since the motive power of our journalism is the scare-line which tells something at a glance. In a democracy, the man who studies his public as he rides downtown in the cars will find it difficult to reach any collective point of view of the crowd. He finds, if he is writing a play, that no theory of his will transcend the popular test of all successful drama: does it get across the "foots," does it appeal to the heart, does it interest?

This applies to all types of drama for all types of people. It holds good for all quality of amusement at the theatre. For beneath the cuticle of culture, we are all akin; the elemental make-up of emotion is the same for all; only the method of expressing this emotion differs. While he was at the height of his melodrama days, Owen Davis — always more or less a student of the peculiar clientele he had for

"Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model" and "Convict 999" — came from studying his audiences with this conclusion:

"I soon found that humanity was the key-note of their interest; that the elemental passions appealed to under a coating of sugar by the Broadway dramatist were the same as those aroused by the Third Avenue playwright without the coating. In all plays, whether given in the two-dollar houses, or in the less imposing ten-twenty-thirty cent places of amusement, there must be at bottom some big dominant human emotion. On Broadway you must hide the springs that move your puppets — and be subtle, moving toward your climax circuitously."

So it was that Owen Davis, graduate from Harvard, laid aside his theories, and, determined in the type of "thriller" wanted of him, made a success of his venture. Only now is he beginning to do the serious work which he has aimed to do for many years; but his critical faculty showed him which way Al Woods was developing. And as long as five years ago he predicted that "Chinatown Charlie" would be forsaken by hordes for such subtle vulgarity as "The Girl in the Taxi."

A man's reach should exceed his grasp, and there is no doubt that there are high planes of aspiration among all our dramatists. Like Jones, who first wrote "The Silver King" — arrant melodrama — before he felt justified in dealing with problems, they speak in broad, and always in comparative terms, regarding American drama, and they show very well their fears and pride.

It was a long while before Charles Klein was received by his public as a critic of American condition, even though years before the advent of "The Lion and the Mouse," "The Third Degree," and "The Gamblers," he had written "The District Attorney" and "The Honorable John Grigsby." Not many readers identify his name as the librettist for "El



*Photo. by Otto Sarony Co.*

CHARLES KLEIN





Capitan" and "Red Feather," yet he had to relinquish his ideas for a while in order to pave the way for popular authority to state them.

Many talks with Mr. Klein only impressed me more and more with the fact that even an undisciplined critical perspective tends beyond the point where it would be expedient to practice. Mr. Klein's philosophy of life is much clearer in his conversation than in his plays. Maybe, as he says, the public obtains in these plays of his a point of view that filters through his individuality. "That there is an American drama," he once said to me, "is as certain as that there is an American life. But we are in the process of adjustment; we have reached and are in the experimental stage. Our drama is forming. In the near future, there will arise a social conflict; and the East will struggle with the West. From this opposition, a great drama will be born."

But Mr. Klein in his social and economic history is rather undisciplined. "The Lion and the Mouse" and "The Gamblers" show this. The critical faculty must have a care how far it goes without intellectual justification. Unwarranted statements from our dramatists, such as fill the daily press, show the need for a body of ideas that are more sanely optimistic. I shall try to epitomize Mr. Klein's critical outlook as concisely and as faithfully as possible.

"It is true that the public wishes psychology," he declared, "but no half-lights; that is Ibsen's treatment. There is much melodrama in life, but not all of it is the conflict of violent emotion. We often see the effects without the causes, but the American mind, to be convinced, must have both. Mellow light, mere shadowgraph, will not convince. That is partly the reason Bernard Shaw's influence, to my mind, is negative; he tears down ideals without building, and his ruthlessness results in reaction. The denial of a higher truth always creates disgust.

“Both Shaw and Ibsen only tell half-truths. To be an incomparable technician is not everything, but whereas Ibsen assails what we hold in abhorrence, Shaw turns to what is sacred. Goethe dubbed Mephistopheles ‘the spirit of negation,’ but it takes a fairly good comedian to wear a Mephistopheles’ make-up. I cannot believe that a man, like Shaw, who denies everything, from pure love to pure music, is a public beneficence; only the man who affirms what is good tells the whole truth.”

When a dramatist talks aloud in this fashion, he is in a way sending out that part of him which in stage dialogue might be considered didactic. One may dare much in criticism; it is supposed to question art in terms of far-vision; it is supposed to weigh causes in the light of far-reaching effects. That is where the constructive ability of the critic gives him claim to imagination of a high creative order. It represents the impulse back of the writer — the impulse to be a good citizen. For the dramatist, above all other professional and artistic persons, must be a strong, virile citizen.

“In American life,” Mr. Klein continued, “the important feature is to emulate, to imitate. Everyone is striving to be rich; in the instinct, in the *will* to be rich, we surely find the great dramatic action. This race for the material does not bar metaphysical considerations. Avarice is constantly in conflict with principle, with drama as the result, since drama always spells *conflict*. Desire in American condition grapples with obstructing circumstances, with the individual as the centre of the vortex. In trying to express these thoughts we all have to resort to verbs of action.

“A condition is not a problem; after all, it is only a condition, but somewhere in it is the conflict. If the dramatist portray the condition, drama is the outward expression of his views. The American public is guided by instinct along the lines of optimism. We are in process of adjustment with

the classes. Some day the English will undoubtedly undergo a readjustment, but now they are presumably fixed. The very fact that we Americans are finding ourselves, constitutes drama. The American tragedy lies in the fact that we cannot find what we want; the English people have realized that what they have found is empty. Our greatest tragedy will be when we wake up to the truth that our illusions are illusions. In fact, the tragedy of the whole world, a tragedy wherein the element of hope is seen in the very fact that we search for something higher, is the almost discouraging effort to find the truth, the ideal. Europe is degenerating in moral tone because she has no hope. I glean from Gibbon that when sexual instinct absorbs a nation as it appears to absorb France, there is very little room left for the development of any other instinct. The healthy part of us is that the American mind is not yet so absorbed."

Now, in recording these views of Mr. Klein's, I do not wish to leave the impression that they do not in some small way appear in his dramas. I give them as the unified expression of the average American interest in dramatic condition; for the dramatist does not have to be a student of drama. If he possesses the instinct, if he keeps in touch with the theatre conditions around him, if he reads and sees plays, that is all he needs. Unconsciously, he senses the evolution of form; unconsciously he shapes his material in that mould to which his good taste, his interest, and his motive lead him.

But the dramatist, if he is anything of a craftsman, has to know something more than the mere letter of his trade. Though he never use economics, sociology, biology, or kindred subjects, he is the richer for a knowledge which allows his imagination to explore in fields closed to untutored minds. No dramatist in his play can say — such shall be the moral verdict, such shall be the solution of poverty, such shall be

the future of America. But the critic can say to the dramatist — such will be the moral verdict, such may be the solution of poverty, such tends to be the future of America when you come to it. Our drama needs knowledge upon which to develop a rich imagination.



*Photo. by Pach Bros*

RICHARD HARDING DAVIS



## CHAPTER III

### THE TREND OF AMERICAN DRAMA FROM 1750 TO 1870

#### I

THE amusement world is large enough to foster repertory houses, for America cannot afford to let dramatic material go to waste. Certain excellent quality in the satire of Charles Hoyt's farces should be rehabilitated, and there is no doubt that Edward Harrigan's Irish fun was fraught with a genuineness that should be perpetuated. Professor Matthews once spoke of Weber and Fields and their products as the Aristophanes period of American drama, yet it is as impossible to perpetuate the peculiar genius of these two as to re-create the unctuousness of the elder Hackett, the geniality of John Gilbert, or the humor of John T. Raymond.

The time has come for stock companies; these institutions are the real dramatic storehouses of the country. But Daniel Frohman, in his "Memories of a Manager," is far from believing that a return to the old-time system can be effected. Repertory companies reproduce successes of only a few seasons past, like Davis's "Soldiers of Fortune" and Thomas's "Arizona." They occasionally take standardized plays, like Lottie Blair Parker's "Way Down East" (1897) or "Under Southern Skies" (1901), and like C. T. Dazey's "In Old Kentucky," familiar to everyone. In the face of theatrical circuits, however, audiences are more likely to want the success of the season immediately past — a season which wins for the play the headline that "it ran

for one hundred and fifty consecutive nights in New York." Yet such advertising, though it dupe the provincial theatre-goer, is not always true, for, as pointed out in a pamphlet on "The Amusement Situation in the City of Boston,"<sup>1</sup> "hardly a bulletin-board announcing a New York run but brazenly and boldly lies about its extent. Ten or twelve weeks in New York (several of which were very probably in Brooklyn or in remotely situated theatres) is advertised on the road as 'One Year in New York,' or '300 Nights on Broadway.' A season of thirty weeks (divided among the same groups of theatres) is advertised on the road as 'Seventy weeks in New York,' or '490 days in New York.' More conscientious managers actually run their plays in the smaller New York theatres week after week at considerable loss to themselves, in order to get some excuse for sending them upon the road as a claimed 'Broadway Success,' with a record for a long run!"

I quote this as authentic evidence of the fact that with the increase of theatrical business, the road has either become a place for trying out, or for duping. The manager peddles his wares, unless he has no wares to peddle; then he falls back upon the scrap heap, out of which he builds himself a repertory.

These stock company houses are good things, even though they tend unmercifully to overwork the actor. They are excellent measure of the vitality of a play, and, except in the instances of special revivals, they are the only havens where the theatre-goer may hope to keep in touch with the

<sup>1</sup> Based on a study of the theatres for ten weeks, from Nov. 28, 1909, to Feb. 5, 1910. This is a report of the Drama Committee of the Twentieth Century Club, of that city. The theatre receives social treatment, also, in a more pretentious way, in a pamphlet: "The Exploitation of Pleasure: A Study of Commercial Recreations in New York City," by Michael M. Davis, Jr., published by the Department of Child Hygiene, of the Russell Sage Foundation.



past. When the New Theatre was contemplating the revival of a few old American dramas, it might have been well had the Director kept his eye upon these repertory centres.

It would seem, to go a step further, that the time has even arrived for us to renovate some of the popular plays of the past. Robson and Crane became noted in their production of Howard's "The Henrietta;" and "The Young Mrs. Winthrop," by the same author, still has appeal and literary flavor. These plays are old-fashioned—not in their plots, not in their essential human interest, but in their contemporaneousness. This contemporaneousness should be made contemporary, unless the play is dependent upon the atmosphere of the past.

B. E. Woolf's "The Mighty Dollar" (1875), with literally "millions in it," used to draw crowded houses, quite as much on account of the amusing characteristics of *Judge Bardwell Slote, M.C.*, from Cohosh district, as because of the acting of W. J. Florence. *Mulberry Sellers*, the famous vehicle for John T. Raymond, made Mark Twain's "The Gilded Age"—a play with ample humor, and worth renovating. Professor Matthews, always ready with a literary analogy, would connect the latter play with Jonson's "The Divill is an Ass" (1616). Maybe Mr. Clemens sought to renovate the Elizabethans, even as Colley Cibber rewrote Shakespeare, but there is enough good matter in *Sellers* to have a revival, after the manuscript has been adequately reinforced by a skilled craftsman.

This much we know: that there are no available copies of "The Mighty Dollar" or of "The Gilded Age," and that they should be in type. Their historical importance lies in the attempt they made to create the American for the stage. They were eccentric, in the sense that Weber and Fields were eccentric, and they depended largely upon the

genius of the actor. They were built parts, in the sense that *Dundreary*, under the fashioning of E. A. Sothern's nimble wit, was a growth from forty-seven lines. It is my belief that the old-fashioned conception of the American would be as amusing to present generations—even though out of date—as the conventional Englishman in *Dundreary*, which was revived by Sothern, the son. But, in order to retain some vestige of originality, despite the evanescent character of much of the dialogue, it should be made incumbent upon the author or the producer to publish the play as originally conceived.

It may be claimed with justice that such actors as Sothern, Irving, Jefferson, and Mansfield have created marvellous acting parts; but there is much doubt as to whether the public of the older generation would accept Sothern's son as *Dundreary*, Jefferson's son as *Rip Van Winkle*, and Irving's son as *Mathias* in "The Bells." They are commendable substitutes, but they are in no way just as good. Even now, there is prejudice in the minds of those who have seen Booth, as though lingering memory will better theatrical condition! Yet one cannot discount the prejudices of an audience, and there is ample cause to believe that were an actor to play "Beau Brummel" or "A Parisian Romance," ripe upon Mansfield's death, he would suffer in comparison. But must we, because of a prejudice, sacrifice plays that are effective theatrically, whatever the time or season? There is life in all success—for success comes from general approval, and the public heart is much the same always.

I am speaking entirely of dramas that in their day have created wonderful theatrical impressions. There is only one guide a manager should follow in the matter of repertory: renovation must be carried on in the light of modern technique, but in a manner wholly consistent with the tenor of

the piece. Social drama is constructed on the Ibsen pattern; therefore, the screws must be tightened throughout "The Young Mrs. Winthrop," originally modeled on Scribe. The art of renovation is even more of an art than that of translation.

This suggestion of renovation seems both startling and humorous; in it also there is an element of danger. No one wishes to see a modernized Rembrandt, and for my part I deplore amended Miltons and simplified Scotts. But only in an art which is fluid would I consider renovation. For all dramatists know, as the trite saying goes, that plays are never written; that they are rewritten. And they might just as well be revamped in 1911 as in 1875. Yet, without the sanction of the playwright, without his personal supervision, faith must be kept with the original, and that original must be published.

## II

If one should be asked, however, to frame a list of American plays suitable for immediate revival, the task would be disillusionizing. For it would show that previous to 1870, the larger part of American drama only had interest historically and histrionically. It was either history or the actor that encouraged native product — a product cast in foreign mould from the very outset.<sup>1</sup> The way of reviewing the past in American drama is simply to assume points of view that will accord with a consistent grouping of the many plays. The tendencies are much more evident and much more distinctive than the national traits.

For the very earliest theatrical records indicate that our very earliest audiences were accustomed to such comedies

<sup>1</sup> For consideration of the stage "To-day and Yesterday," see my "Famous Actor-Families in America."

as Beaumont and Fletcher's "Rule a Wife and Have a Wife," broad in humor and Elizabethan in diction. In fact, when the drama first came to America, and began its existence at the Williamsburg Theatre, under the patronage of Governor Dinwiddie (September 5, 1752), American civilization was thoroughly English. If the drama started in the South, it was because the Cavalier spirit was ready to receive it, because the Southern landed proprietor, a devotee of Addison and Steele, believed in the luxury of living rather than in making constant preparation for death. The drama forced its way in the North, despite the Puritan prejudice in New England and the Quaker feeling in Philadelphia. Yet we cannot quite blame the qualms of the latter city when its first theatre, opened on April 15, 1754, had for its bill, Rowe's tragedy, "The Fair Penitent." Certain it was that, apart from Shakespeare Cibberized, the early theatre-going taste was atune to Congreve and Farquhar, while the glory of Garrick stamped all acting.<sup>1</sup>

Our first historians of the drama record amateur performances as early as 1749; Otway and Addison were the favored dramatists. But American theatrical enterprise started with William Hallam, whose company constituted the first real "road" organization. This history applies strictly to the rise and progress of the theatre; the type of play, which had nothing whatever to do with the spirit of America, reflected the colonial taste. Some people there are who would so far stretch a point as to claim that for a performance of Garrick's farce, "Lethe," a prologue was prepared, according to the custom of the day, and that this

<sup>1</sup> The reader is referred to George O. Seilhamer's invaluable "History of the American Theatre" (1888); to Dunlap's "History of the American Theatre;" to Joseph Ireland's "Records of the New York Stage from 1750 to 1860"; and to T. Allston Brown's "History of the New York Stage from the First Performance in 1732 to 1901."

prologue represents the first bit of writing done in America for the theatre. I do not believe that an arduous search through the provincial columns of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* or of the *New York Post-boy* would bring to light any hidden American dramatist before Royall Tyler appeared upon the scene; that is, one whose distinct aim was to display the American spirit.

By the time our colonists became accustomed to "profane stage plays," the controversial period of American history had arrived, and when the British reached New York and Philadelphia, they turned the playhouses to their own pleasure, the redcoats becoming actors for the occasion. There was a drop curtain in existence for a long while after the Revolution, which tradition claims was painted by Major André.

In our search for dramatic activity in America, it were well to dispose in a word of certain forms of writing done for the stage. Washington was an inveterate theatre-goer, and when the Continental Congress closed the playhouses on October 24, 1774, he was very much perturbed. So that, after his death, the theatres paid him a tribute by having the leading actress, "in the character of the Genius of America weeping over the Tomb of her beloved HERO," recite "A Monody on the Death of GENERAL WASHINGTON." Certainly we cannot in any way regard General Burgoyne as an American playwright, even though his farce, "The Blockade of Boston," dealt with an American subject. But this farce from the British pen, in which the Continental Army was derided, drew from Mrs. Mercy Warren a counter-thrust in "The Blockheads," a burlesque polemic.<sup>1</sup>

It will be seen from such entries that during the Revolution the theatre was a place for satire, smacking of oratory.

<sup>1</sup> See "Beginnings of American Dramatic Literature," Paul Leicester Ford, *New Eng. Mag.*, Feb., 1894, n.s. 9: 673-87.

The product came from the heat of the moment. One might just as well claim that the references to America in Chapman's "Eastward Hoe" or in Shakespeare's "The Tempest," or that Governor Berkeley's dramas were American, as that these controversial pieces were either plays or, strictly speaking, American. For example, Paul Leicester Ford points to "The Battle of Brooklyn," a play by an unknown author, and, despite its ridicule of Washington, doubts whether its origin is British or American. We find many expressions concerning the fall of British tyranny, and as early as 1753, one Le Blanc de Villeneuve wrote "Le Père Indian." We find the students of Yale, under their ministerial president, presenting Barnabas Bidwell's "The Mercenary Match" (1785). In another direction, an activity strictly modern in its haste has been noted in these words by the historian, Clapp: "It was the custom in the earlier days of the theatre to signalize passing events by such appropriate notice as the resources of the stage would permit. The proposed launch of the frigate 'Constitution,' which was set down for September 20, 1797, was regarded by Manager Hodgkinson as an event worthy of his attention. In forty-eight hours he completed a very passable piece, and announced its performance."

These several records will show that the first definite tendency to note in American drama is that the subject-matter, when it drew upon American life and manners, arranged itself in accord with periods in American history. There were, for example, definite Indian plays,<sup>1</sup> some smack-

<sup>1</sup> In an article on "The American Play," by Laurence Hutton (*Lippincott*, 37: 289-98, March, 1886), the following picturesque titles are recorded: "Sassacus; or, The Indian Wife"; "Kairrissah"; "Oroloosa"; "Outalassie"; "The Pawnee Chief"; "Onylda; or, The Pequot Maid"; "Ontiata; or, The Indian Heroine"; "Osceola"; "Oroonoka"; "Tuscatomba"; "Wacousta"; "Tutoona"; "Yemassee"; "Wissahickon." See also A. E. Lancaster's "Historical

ing of the aboriginal. But to-day, the only ones that strike the memory are John Brougham's clever "Po-ca-hon-tas," John Augustus Stone's "Metamora; or, The Last of the Wampanoags," and the recent attempt made by Mary Austin in "The Arrow Maker." There were Revolutionary dramas, ranging from John D. Burke's "Bunker Hill; or, The Death of Gen. Warren" (1798) and Dunlap's "André" (1798) to W. Ioor's "The Battle of the Eutaw Springs, and Evacuation of Charleston; or, The Glorious 14th of December, 1782," first presented in Charleston during 1817. The American historical plays of this period were strictly patriotic, as the titles will imply; they were heroic, bombastic, and, as Lancaster has noted, filled with "romantic traditions, local annals, individual eccentricity, temporary sensation, spread-eagle patriotism, and redskin melodrama." It is enough to record the heroic measures of Hugh Henry Brackenridge's "The Battle of Bunker Hill" (1776), or the same author's dramatic elegy on "The Death of General Montgomery at the Siege of Quebec" (1777). James Nelson Barker wrote "The Indian Princess" (1808) and "Superstition" (1823), and M. M. Noah tried his hand at "Marion; or, The Hero of Lake George." There is no end to the plays based on incidents of the Revolution or of the War of 1812.<sup>1</sup>

American Plays," *Chautauquan*, 31: 359-64 (1900). James Rees declares that the reaction against Indian plays began in 1846. G. W. P. Custis wrote two Indian dramas: "The Indian Prophecy" (1828) and "Pocahontas" (1830).

<sup>1</sup> Note for example C. E. Grice's "The Battle of New Orleans"; George Cockings' "The Conquest of Canada"; S. B. H. Judah's "A Tale of Lexington"; Oliver B. Bunce's "Love in '76" (a social rather than a war play); and countless others that find record in Oscar Wegelin's "Early American Plays (1714-1830)"; in Robert F. Roden's "Later American Plays (1831-1900)"; in an "Index to American Poetry and Plays in the Collection of C. Fiske Harris" (1874); in "More Early American Plays," *Lit. Collect.*, 2:82-84; in published accounts of famous collections of plays owned by the late Thos. J. McKee (144 plays); in the Brinley American Library

And the striking characteristic of many of these plays was that in them representations of live historical personages were introduced. When Victor Mapes's "Captain Barrington" (1903) actually brought the figure of Washington on the boards, people showed surprise, and, to the credit of the actor playing the *rôle*, they went away further surprised that their patriotic sensibilities were not shocked, for historic characters on the stage flavor of the Eden Musée.

But at close range, as in the instance of Royall Tyler, our first American dramatist, in contradistinction to Robert Hunter, whose "Androboros" was the first dramatic piece printed in America (1714), there was no hesitancy regarding historical representation or political allusions. Concerning Dunlap's heroic blank-verse drama of "André," as Professor Matthews has pointed out, the piece was produced on March 30, 1798, with Arnold and Washington still alive, and close upon the incident of André's hanging in 1780. Washington was introduced as one of the characters. The type of play marking the Revolution and the War of 1812 was one of feeling, in which Royalist and American bandied words.

Mr. Ford calls attention to the fact that as early as 1690 the African slave was dealt with in a drama by one Afara Behn, a play called "The Widow Ranter; or, Bacon in Virginia." But the most portentous drama on the subject proved to be the dramatization of Mrs. Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin." The novel was published in 1851, and was almost immediately prepared for the stage by George L. Aitkin, and first presented at the Troy Museum in 1852. This popularity undoubtedly suggested to Dion Boucicault the spirit for his "The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana," which was produced toward the end of 1859.

catalogue; in the Beck and Duyckinck Collections (New York Public Library); and in a collection owned by the Brown University Library.



These types never die out. Dunlap's "André" may be balanced by Clyde Fitch's "Major André"; J. N. Barker's "Superstition" by Herman Hagerdorn's version of "The Witch"; "Uncle Tom's Cabin" by Edward Sheldon's "The Nigger." The differences to be found in them lie in their several techniques, and in their economic and social approaches. If they are not heard of to-day, it is because their vitality was momentary. Take such titles as Charles Gayler's "Bull Run"; as "The Federal Spy; or, Pauline of the Potomac" and "Union Prisoners; or, the Patriot's Daughter." They were hammered out in moments of heat, and possessed none of the healthy value of Gillette's "Secret Service."

The next characteristic to note in American drama is the influence of Germany upon the theatre, not only with the plays of Schiller, but more particularly with the prolific Kotzebue's (1761-1819) examples of melodrama. We know, for instance, how thoroughly influenced William Dunlap<sup>1</sup> (1766-1839) became by such pieces; how prone he was to be interested in drama of the type of "Douglas" and "Venice Preserved." Hence, a large part of his time was spent in translating Kotzebue,<sup>2</sup> after he had gone to the trouble of mastering German for that special purpose. Dunlap was our first dramatic manipulator; he was the first theatre manager to illustrate how readily foreign material might be turned to American advantage, without costing much.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Publications of the Dunlap Society. Much valuable material on Dunlap is owned by the New York Historical Society. See "Publications," vol. 14, vol. 15, vol. 24, vol. 30, for Dunlap's diary.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Smith (b. 1768) likewise translated Kotzebue. See Wegelin.

<sup>3</sup> See Frederick H. Wilkin's "Early Influence of German Literature in America," *Americana Germanica*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1899,

It is strange that Tyler (1758-1826) on one hand, and that Dunlap on the other, did not at first approach the theatre with any direct intention of writing for it. In fact, the former, graduate of Harvard, was a soldier and a lawyer, and had never been to the theatre in his life until sent to New York on diplomatic service relating to Shays' Rebellion. Then it was that the stage took hold of him, and within a few weeks he had written "The Contrast" (1787), crude but pleasing to the tastes of Wignell, low comedian. Tyler seems to have been quite indifferent to his success, though he immediately proceeded to write the libretto for a comic opera, "May-day in Town; or, New York in an Uproar," and some years after, in 1797, he was ready with "A Good Spec; or, Land in the Moon," dealing with the Yazoo scandal in Georgia.

During this time, Dunlap was in Europe, and had heard nothing of Tyler's favor with "The Contrast." He had been studying art under Benjamin West, and though he could boast of a liking for the theatre in London, with Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, Palmer, Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Abingdon, and Miss Farren in the ascendancy, he might not be considered to have been in the least stage-struck. But Tyler fired his enthusiasm, and he immediately began on that career which was to cover several decades, and to win for him the name of "Father of the American Drama." His first play — discounting his youthful dramatization of "The Arabian Nights," — was "Modest Soldier; or, Love in New York," and was never mounted. During 1789, "The Father; or, American

pp. 103-205. Note also the following: C. F. Brede's "Schiller on the Philadelphia Stage, to the year 1830"; W. H. Carruth's "Schiller and America"; E. C. Parry's "Schiller in America." Also read Kuno Francke's "Schiller's Message to Modern Life," *Atlantic*, 95: 611-16. See Ch. Rabany's "Kotzebue: sa Vie et son Temps," Paris, 1893; also a dissertation by Walter Sellier on "Kotzebue in England."

Shandyism" was given at the New York John Street Theatre—a play which was revised in 1807 under the title of "Father of an Only Child." It was after this that he became manager of a theatre—at first with Hallam and Hodgkinson, but afterwards by himself.<sup>1</sup>

There is a character in "The Contrast" which is a definite drawing of Yankee eccentricities, and may be taken as the first effort of an American dramatist to be subtly American. It suggests another tendency in the subject-matter we are tracing: that effort to catch the national traits marking the American people. The general fault in this type of play has been very well stated by Professor Matthews:<sup>2</sup>

"An apt epigram is afloat — ascribed to Mr. Boucicault — to the effect that 'All that the Americans seem to recognize as dramatic here is the caricature of character, and that is what the successful plays are — caricature of eccentric character set in a weak dramatic framework.' This, like most epigrams, is a smart setting of a half-truth. Americans recognize the character through the caricature, accepting the latter only for lack of the former. The want is want of art on the part of the authors."

But though such further efforts as those of Samuel Woodworth in "The Forest Rose; or, American Farmers" (1825)

<sup>1</sup> In the Dunlap Soc. edition of "The Father; or, American Shandyism," with an introduction by Thos J. McKee, there is a complete bibliography of sixty-three plays; see pp. x-xi. During 1806, Dunlap, having retired from active theatre work, wrote his history of the theatre, and then published four volumes comprising fifteen of his plays; he also resumed his work as an artist. An excellent picture of Dunlap forms the frontispiece for Wegelin's "Early American Plays." See also the Dunlap Soc. edition of "André," edited by Brander Matthews (1887). Tyler's "The Contrast" was reprinted by the Dunlap Soc., in 1887. For a portrait of Tyler, see *New Eng. Mag.*, 1894, n.s., 9: 675.

<sup>2</sup> "The American on the Stage," *Century*, 18: 321-33, July, 1879. See also Laurence Hutton's "The American Play," *Lippincott*, 37: 289-98, March, 1886.

may be regarded in the historical evolution, the Yankee came, not by way of literary dramatic expression, but by way of eccentric American acting. If one should desire the real cause for the American type, it would be necessary to examine into the nature and temperament of the comedians, George H. Hill and James H. Hackett.<sup>1</sup> The fact is, Hackett assumed the rôle of *Jonathan Ploughboy* in Woodworth's pastoral, and then, being identified with things American, set to work to create such characterizations as *Rip Van Winkle*, *Col. Nimrod Wildfire* in James K. Paulding's "The Lion of the West" (1831),—which proved to be so popular that Bayle Bernard introduced the same character in a drama entitled "The Kentuckian,"—and three Dutch Governors, in a play of that title, which Bernard dramatized from Irving's "Knickerbocker History."

It was the genius of the actors, therefore, that encouraged the American type. Their ability to create an accent, as broad and as humorous as their French or Irish, resulted in a following for the eccentric in drama. Hackett's *Yankee Solomon Swap*, and his *Horse-shoe Robinson*, based on John P. Kennedy's novel, were dependent absolutely upon the live personality of the player. Anyone reading J. S. Jones' "The People's Lawyer,"<sup>2</sup> in which occurs the character of *Solon Shingle*, a country teamster, would hardly draw from it what audiences drew from the work of John E. Owens, or of George H. Hill when it was first played at the Boston National, in 1839. The required costume of *Solon* would alone measure the broadness of the caricature: "Dark drab old-fashioned surtout with capes, Sheep's

<sup>1</sup> See my "Famous Actor-Families in America" for a chapter on "The Hacketts." In the same volume, under "The Jeffersons," will be found traced the evolution of "Rip Van Winkle." See French's Standard Drama, 174, for Burke's version.

<sup>2</sup> French's Standard Drama, 248. See also in the same series, 173, "The Vermont Wool-dealer," a farce.

grey trowsers, lead colored striped vest, old style black stock, cow-hide boots, broad-brimmed low-crowned hat, bald-headed flaxen wig." The same latitude is to be found in C. A. Logan's "Yankee Land"<sup>1</sup> which, produced at the Park Theatre in 1834, introduced Hackett as *Lot Sago*.

Tom Taylor, quick to fathom the popular appeal, now prepared "Our American Cousin," in which *Asa Trenchard*, the rough, whole-souled Yankee, was pitted against *Dundreary*. This was as surely the outcome of Hackett's Yankee victories as *Davy Crockett* was the successor of *Nimrod Wildfire*.

The land resounded with the Yankee brogue, or with local eccentricities, North, South, East, and West.<sup>2</sup> The first of Lowell's "Biglow Papers" appeared in 1846; Mark Twain fixed indelibly life on the Mississippi River in the early '50's; Bret Harte, in 1854, went to California to catch the mountain dialect and the mountain manner. In the South, there was a whole line of humorists, including Joseph G. Baldwin, Augustus B. Longstreet, W. T. Thompson, and J. J. Hooper, who caught the eccentric character of the Black Belt. As far as the stage was concerned, a good actor could make a bad play go, but, because of the flimsy material, the play ceased with the actor. Playgoers understand, for example, what Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's "The Gilded Age" suffered from the hands of George B. Dinsmore, who, unauthorized, put *Colonel Sellers* in a play. Litigation ensued, and the manuscript reverted to Mr. Clemens, who touched it up, but John T. Raymond alone

<sup>1</sup> French's *Minor Drama*, 202.

<sup>2</sup> Modern instances of typical books from which successful dramatizations have been made are plentiful; for example, Annie Hagen Rice's "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch" and Edward Noyes Westcott's "David Harum."

made *Sellers*.<sup>1</sup> According to Howells, who wrote of it in 1875, the play was "scarcely more than a sketch, a framework almost as naked as that which the Italians used to clothe on with their *commedia d'arte*; and it [was] as unlike good literature as many other excellent acting plays. . . . [It was] true, in its broad way, to American conditions, and [was] a fair and just satire upon our generally recognized social and political corruptions."<sup>2</sup>

Such social satire, slightly vulgarized, was to be found in B. E. Woolf's "The Mighty Dollar" (1875), which, as we have said, W. J. Florence made so famous by his characterization of *Judge Bardwell Slote*, a speculative drama whose modern counterpart some critics detected in W. H. Crane's delineation of *Hannibal Rivers* in "The Senator" (1890). These national types narrowed down to local idols, and no more popular character was known to the stage of 1848 than *Mose*, a New York Fire Boy, whom Chanfrau personated in "A Glance at New York." Reading it through, one discovers strange local allusions marking the time, but more than that one detects the identical movement so familiar in the humor of modern melodrama. I imagine *Mose* might slip into the cast of "Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model" with perfect impunity. It is the tough type later dealt with in Townsend's "Chimmie Fadden" and in Owen Kildare's "My Mamie Rose," but with none of the naturalism of present day technique. It was familiar rough-and-tumble drama, with glaring pathos, coarse humor, and burlesque interruptions.

But already we note this fact concerning the regard of the American dramatist. in his effort to create the American

<sup>1</sup> See chapter on Raymond by Franklyn Fyles, contained in the second volume of McKay and Wingate's "Famous American Actors of To-day."

<sup>2</sup> *Atlantic*, 35: 749, June, 1875.

type he was obliged to create American condition. And we soon find the trail of society drama sketching the manners and customs of distinct decades. That is why, in reading the early American dramas, it were well to connect Mrs. Mowatt's "Fashion" (1845) and Mrs. Sidney F. Bateman's "Self" (1856) with the reading of Fanny Kemble's New York experiences and with the travels of Tyrone Power. John Brougham came to New York around 1842, and he used to shoot birds in the woods near Twenty-third Street, and to take suburban drives around the old reservoir on Forty-second Street, where the New York Public Library now stands.

The current papers seemed surprised over the facility of ordinary dialogue used in these plays — dialogue containing local allusion of the street and parlor of that time, introducing the conventional English dialect, exploiting the *parvenu* desire to utter French phrases, making use of negro dialect as incongruous as that resorted to by Poe in "The Gold Bug." One may trace the period by the references to civic improvements, as when Mrs. Bateman makes one of her characters speak of horses slipping on the Russ pavements. There is a slight touch of Harriet Martineau's political economy in attitudes strictly feminine.

At the time of Mrs. Mowatt's "Fashion," New York whirled around Canal Street. All society drama seemed to know but one situation: the mad rush after money and social prestige at the moment when financial ruin threatened a family. It sought to be satire aimed particularly at the effort to be English, for the American is introduced breezily and roughly, — note *Adam Trueman*, the farmer, in "Fashion." Lower Broadway was the promenade, with its busses and carriages rolling out into the country — possibly to Central Park — carrying parties for recreation. The theatres were clustered around the lower end of New York when "Fashion"

was presented at the Park Theatre (March 24, 1845), opposite the old Astor House on Vesey Street. Even then theatrical life had flowed from the Battery to Park Row; it was soon to creep up Broadway, the Wallacks going from Brougham's Lyceum near Broome Street on Broadway to Thirteenth Street, thence to Thirtieth. New York theatres have moved with the parks. At one time, Twenty-third Street was considered a central location for drama, but now Forty-second Street seems to be the established point of activity. Theatrical conditions have enlarged since the days of "Fashion," and so has social life.

Poe<sup>1</sup> was not quite in accord with the "modern drama" of his day, yet, despite his prejudiced feeling, his comments anent "Fashion" have truth in them. If I quote him at length, it is to illustrate how aloof he was, nevertheless, from the true spirit of the theatre, even though his literary sense measured aptly the "monstrous inartisticalities." He wrote:

"The day has at length arrived when men demand rationalities in place of conventionalities. It will no longer do to copy, even with absolute accuracy, the whole tone of even so ingenious and really spirited a thing as the 'School for Scandal.'<sup>2</sup> It was comparatively good in its day, but it would be positively bad at the present day, and imitations of it are inadmissible at any day.

"Bearing in mind the spirit of these observations, we may say that 'Fashion' is theatrical but not dramatic. It is a pretty well-arranged selection from the usual *routine* of stage characters, and stage manœuvres — but there is not one particle of any nature, beyond greenroom nature, about

<sup>1</sup> The over-conscientiousness of Poe's criticism is seen in his confession (*Broadway Journal*, April 5, 1845) that since its opening he had been to Mrs. Mowatt's "Fashion" every night, in order to determine the full extent of its merits and demerits.

<sup>2</sup> See "Later Criticism" (V) in *Virginia edition* of his works.



it. No such events ever happened in fact, or ever could happen, as happen in 'Fashion.' Nor are we quarreling, now, with the mere *exaggeration* of character or incident; were this all, the play, although bad as comedy, might be good as farce, of which the exaggeration of possible incongruities is the chief element. Our faultfinding is on the score of deficiency in verisimilitude — in natural art — that is to say, in art based on the natural laws of man's heart and understanding."

It is this violent distortion which marks Boucicault's "The Streets of New York" (1857), Daly's "Under the Gaslight" (1867), and Howard's "Saratoga" (1870), equally as lacking in verisimilitude as "Fashion" or as "Self." In contrast with these, Langdon Mitchell's "The New York Idea" (1906) is a striking and excellent example of the progress made in American social drama. The early stage cared nothing for invention or plot, and its wit lay in caricature. Mr. Mitchell's comedy<sup>1</sup> is good reading; it has literary tone, and, above all, it lacks grotesque wit, substituting instead brilliant humor.

The progress of the American theatre is marked by the manager as well as by the actor. John Brougham,<sup>2</sup> of Irish extraction, did much for the stage practically as well as literarily. His mind was prolific in the interests of W. E. Burton, who was himself a devotee of the pen. Comedies, farces, melodramas, comediettas, dramatizations, especially of Dickens, spectaculars and burlesques are to the credit of Brougham,<sup>3</sup> yet not one of his plays has had vitality enough to hold the boards. Yet in the '50's, no man was more prominent than he — writer, manager, and actor.

<sup>1</sup> Printed privately.

<sup>2</sup> See *Life* by William Winter; see also the latter's "Other Days."

<sup>3</sup> See Wegelin.

Succeeding him came the Wallack galaxy, J. W. Wallack revising Congreve's "Love for Love," and Lester Wallack (1820-1888) writing "Two to One; or, The King's Visit" (1854), "First Impressions" (1856), "The Veteran" (1859), "The Romance of a Poor Young Man" (1859), "Central Park" (1861), and "Rosedale" (1863). Close upon the brilliancy of Wallack's stock companies came Palmer's Union Square Theatre Company,<sup>1</sup> which carried its prestige to the Madison Square Theatre and thence to the Lyceum, when Daniel Frohman came into the horizon. In the meantime, Augustin Daly (1838-1899), in 1862, adapted "Leah, the Forsaken" from Mosenthal, and therewith began his career, which was to include his pruning and arranging of the Elizabethan drama, and his adaptations of French pieces like "Frou-Frou." Such a survey as is here given cannot ignore the managerial *régime* of Laura Keane, or the dramatization of "Camille" by Matilda Heron (1856).

But Wallack with his English proclivities, and Palmer with his numerous D'Ennery and Sardou adaptations by A. R. Cazauban, which were deprived of social significance, and Daly with his German dependence, might hardly be deemed influences on the American dramatist, until 1870 brought Bronson Howard to the field. Yet these managers had much to say concerning the American drama. In 1893, Palmer<sup>2</sup> wrote, apropos of Bartley Campbell and his contemporaries:

"The prominent evil tendency of the American writer has been to look for his types among his countrymen of the baser sort, who never by any possibility pronounce English words properly and who seem to take the greatest pains to speak

<sup>1</sup> See *The American Magazine*, 9:1-23, Nov., 1888, an article on Palmer by George Edgar Montgomery. The Boston Museum was dominated by the personality of manager Field.

<sup>2</sup> *Forum*, 15:614-20.



*Photo. by Aimé Dupont*

AUGUSTIN DALY



slang and utter vulgarisms, and to act as if good manners were a reproach instead of an accomplishment."

Augustin Daly became general, after specifying that the American dramatist of his day sought to emulate the masterpieces of modern fiction. He wrote (1886):

"Boker might have idealized the Kentucky tragedy instead of the Rimini drama, and Bird might have made his *Spartacus* an Indian Chief—but our national theatre has lost nothing by their omission. The present masterpieces of the stage, in every tongue, are pictures of the passions of mankind in general."

Finally, I quote the opinions of Boucicault,<sup>1</sup> whose dramas are prolific and whose plots are ingenious—Boucicault, the sentimentalist, whose Irish humor was not native, but who directed himself into native channels because he was enough of the playwright to give the public what was opportune, like "The Relief of Lucknow" (1858). He deplored "the philosophical school of sociology," and deprecated the naturalism of Zola and the realism of Ibsen. Given always to broad expressions of opinion, he wrote (1890):

"Tragedy and high comedy will always be held in respect on the future American stage, but it seems probable that the drama of modern life, the reflex of the period, will prevail over every other kind of entertainment. This drama will present a character, or a group of characters, not a complicated or sensational action, affording a physiological study by way of illustration, not by way of description."

Thus spoke those most prominent in the theatrical field before the advent of Charles and Daniel Frohman, before the actual period when the American dramatist found it an advantage to be American. There are other tendencies in the development, to be noted in the next chapter, but this summary will be sufficient to indicate that, though the body

<sup>1</sup> *Arena*, 2: 641-52, Nov., 1890.

of American drama is large, its form is out of fashion and is of interest simply as history or as a measure of histrionic ability.

We do not repudiate the development of American drama before 1870, but we do not rank it as high. We revere the names of Booth and Barrett, of Jefferson and Holland, of Davenport, Gilbert, and Clarke, of Laura Keane and Charlotte Cushman. But the drama in those days developed under peculiar social and economic conditions which are over; the type, the form, and the manner are over.

We are sure to find the average and the below-the-average in each and every age. There was as much mediocre stage material before 1870 as after, in fact more. I only question a production in the light of what I know of my time; I test its artistic quality by whatever culture I may have; I challenge its morality by what I have learned of the moral atmosphere in which I live. No critic should undervalue or overvalue. But the service of an historical perspective in such a survey as this lies in the conclusions which result. For one who has read dramatic history aright can see that the modern theatre calls for different acting because of the change in stage technique. The business of the theatre to-day cannot be managed as Booth mismanaged his theatre in New York. If the drama often lies in the hands of money-changers, such condition is a business condition which has to alter before art may flourish. The drama must pass through its evolution, through its periods of types and conditions. If people are interested in social reform, it must reflect society. That seems to be where it is to-day.

Before 1870, the American dramatist, as we take him in the studies to follow, did not exist. But effort toward Americanism did find root, even as early as Royall Tyler, and in tracing this persistent effort is to be found the chief value of any literal historical survey.

## CHAPTER IV

### OUR LITERARY AND OUR CLOSET-DRAMA

#### I

DRAMATIC history clearly demonstrates to the student that while it is not necessary for a play to be literature, any play that is true to the essentials of that segment of life with which it deals cannot help but be literature. Yet neither proposition implies that in order to be literature, drama needs must sacrifice its fundamental moving and progressive character.

Tradition creates stolid impressions, and after 1830, when Hugo and Dumas set the dramatic pace, tragedy on every hand was couched in nothing but a grandiloquent manner. Every one copied the Elizabethans, and it was considered false to theatrical standards to select any subject for stage treatment that would not be aloof and most likely historical. Our American authors were interested in foreign literature; Longfellow, Lowell, and later, Bayard Taylor, showed enthusiasm for continental ideas, mediæval or modern.

In one respect, the literary drama in America flourished as it did in England — through the support and interest of the actor. But while the American literary type was nought in comparison with the British type, Edwin Forrest in magnitude was no inferior to Macready and Irving, who stood sponsors for Browning and Tennyson. Except for the historical perspective, this phase of American drama

might be dismissed in a general way, but Forrest, through power and animal magnetism, carried many a verbose text across the footlights. His whole method as an actor encouraged such pieces as Stone's "Metamora," Bird's "The Gladiator," and Conrad's "Jack Cade."

Yet, while there is a certain rolling sonorousness in these, they are not native in the sense that the subject matter was native to the soil. They were imitative, as John Howard Payne was imitative in "Brutus; or, the Fall of Tarquin" (1818). The old English drama was the model, while Italy, Spain, or Germany appeared to be the locality. In choice of subject alone, these literary aspirants for the drama exhibited their preconceived notions as to tragedy. The Southerners who wrote dramas knew nothing outside of foreign realms. A. J. Requier became author of "The Spanish Exile" (1842); George Henry Miles wrote "Mohammed" (1850), "De Soto" (1853), and "Señor Valiente" (1858); Caroline Lee Hentz published a five-act tragedy, "De Lara; or, The Moorish Bride" (1843); while Isaac Harby, in the stream of classic tradition and of Kotzebue influence, wrote "Alexander Severus" (1807) and "Alberti" (1819).<sup>1</sup>

What Professor Matthews says of England may very well be said of America: that its "literature is strewed with wrecked tragedies, lofty enough in aspiration, but pitifully lacking in imagination." If these pieces found their way to the stage, they did so because they were nurtured by the mistaken beliefs of some manager. When J. W. Wallack was in charge of The National, he had faith in the dramatic powers of Nathaniel P. Willis, but, save in "Tortosa, the Usurer" (1839), Willis cannot be said to have approached the requirements of the stage. Even in "Tortosa" he was

<sup>1</sup> See Bibliography: "Southern Fiction Prior to 1860." James Gibson Johnson. Charlottesville, Va., 1909.



undramatic though oratorical; he had read Hugo, and he knew his *Shylock* and his *Juliet*. In fact, these early authors who wrote literary or closet-dramas were so steeped in Shakespeare that echoes of the great poet's lines are easily detected everywhere. Boker's "Francesca da Rimini," his most suitably theatrical play, is simply riddled with Elizabethan harmonies — lines barely changed save to make the verse weaker, and containing the identical sentiment put in a less inevitable way.

The Knickerbocker, the New England, the Philadelphia, and the Southern schools, therefore, held the same notions regarding the drama as a readable and as an actable medium. The literary man's attitude toward the theatre was that of the *dilettante*; it was amateurish, though there was a sincere desire on his part to excel in the art. But the *littérateur* had a mistaken notion as to the province of the theatre, and he was not willing to serve apprenticeship. Besides which, in his choice of subject, he was prompted by the old-fashioned broadness of acting, and he wrote romantic melodrama — romantic in a sort of external psychology, but statuesque in action. That notion of the heroic has persisted, as we shall see when we come to consider the Tragic Spirit and the American people.

It is false, however, to separate literature and drama. While it is legitimate to accept the closet-drama as a form in itself, it is not legitimate to consider it as in any way necessary to the theatre. It is a hybrid type which Professor Matthews rightly notes appeared and appears only at times when literature and the theatre are divorced.<sup>1</sup> Every poet who has written a play has intended it for the stage, but he has approached his task wrongly. And so we begin to realize the hopelessness of claiming the closet-drama as part

<sup>1</sup> See "The Legitimacy of the Closet-Drama." Brander Matthews. *Scribner's*, February, 1908.

of the strength of the theatre, when we read H. A. Beers' opinion of it:

"[The closet-dramatist] need not sacrifice truth of character and probability of plot to the need of highly accentuated situations. He does not have to consider whether a speech is too long, too ornate in diction, too deeply thoughtful for recitation by an actor. If the action lags at certain points, let it lag. In short, as the aim of the closet-dramatist is other than the playwright's, so his methods may be independent."

This statement gives a false impression of the relation between literature and drama; one is a principle of thought and expression; the other is a form of thought and expression. To deny that drama cannot come within the category of literature is to deny that drama may ever have a claim to permanence. True literature is unconscious excellence. Shakespeare wrote plays rather than poetry, yet the poetry in them preserves them, and they live because, though the action is generally conventional, the spiritual quality and the mental value are there without hurting the movement of the whole. Modern drama, alone, refutes the claim that closet-plays are closet-plays simply because they aim to be literature. Effective stage pieces, as a rule, have not been pleasing to read, but that is the fault of the literary sense of the author who has aimed for appreciation through outward theatrical effect.

There are two sentences in Professor Matthews' "The Literary Merit of Our Latter-day Drama"<sup>1</sup> which point to cardinal weaknesses in the closet-drama. He claims that "a dramatist who fails to please the play-going public of his own time will never have another chance," and again he writes that "style is the great antiseptic, no doubt, but style cannot bestow life on the still-born." In both of these

<sup>1</sup> See "Inquiries and Opinions."

respects, closet-dramas have failed, and, therefore, as a stage consideration, they exert no influence. Managers lose whenever they mount such plays, for usually literature of this kind cares nothing for the practical limitation of technique or of stage accessory. If it is not a drama of ideas, it is a drama of imagery; it is discursive rather than concentrated; it is slow-moving rather than active; it is poetic rather than dramatic.

Longfellow, after seeing "The Vicar of Wakefield" in dramatization, was convinced of the superiority of dramatic representation over narrative. But, on the other hand, he was never keenly alive to the actions and reactions of life, which manifest themselves in active situations rather than in pictures. We find him, therefore, writing as early as 1845: "Felt more than ever to-day the difference between my ideal home-world of Poetry, and the outer, actual, tangible Prose-world. When I go out of the precincts of my study, down the village street to college, how the scaffolding about the Palace of Song comes rattling and clattering down." "The Spanish Student" (1843) and the "Tragedies" failed to find their way to the stage.

In other words, the closet-dramatist has suffered because he has been too contemplative on one hand, and because, on the other, he has placed too much attention upon ornamentation. W. D. Howells and Henry James reduced the oratorical to terms of modern prose rhythm, and in their dialogues they came very near the requirements of the stage. Mr. Howells' farces have all been published,<sup>1</sup> and their literary flavor once more suggests to us a weakness in the argument that literature and drama are incompatible. The fault with Mr. Howells lies in the fact that his outlook upon life is narrative, and that he is too faithful in noting

<sup>1</sup> See partial list in Roden's "Later American Plays." See also catalogues of Harper & Bros.

small conversation. But Mr. Howells has not been an influence in American drama, however much his interest has been centered on the stage. In 1877, Lawrence Barrett appeared in his "Counterfeit Presentment," and in 1878 appeared in his "Yorick's Love."

But, like Henry James and Hamlin Garland, Mr. Howells has a theoretical view of drama. All of them are interested in the stage from the narrative and inventive standpoints; they are pleased with the inventions, the ideas, the characterizations, the moral problems, the philosophy, the social attitudes, but the dramatic manner does not concern them. They disdain the theatrical, not realizing that consistent theatricalism may enter the realms of literature. Charles Klein, for instance, has misused theatricalism, though his plays have been popular, and in many of their situations effective. In no way are his plays closet-dramas; they are thoroughly actable. But he oftentimes perverts what the literary dramatist fails to use at all.

I shall later speak of the dramatic *sense* possessed both by Mr. Howells and Mr. James; even in their narrative, they realize the essence of comedy — that essence which would be of greatest benefit to the American stage were it possessed by the American dramatist. In comparison with the early literary coteries, however, Howells and James are nearer the real spirit of the modern drama.

The popular play is being published to-day for a reading public eager to have it; and gradually the literary following is coming to realize that simply because of the fact that a drama is actable is no reason that it is not also readable. Those who try to pore through Sheridan Knowles' "Brutus" or Conrad's "Jack Cade" will realize how much of the success was due to acting; in fact how much of the dialogue was written for the actor. Henry Arthur Jones is a great believer in the literary value of modern drama, upholding

the idea that if a play is truly alive, it must be literature.<sup>1</sup> And his belief finds full expression in the following:

"If you have faithfully and searchingly studied your fellow-citizens; if you have selected from amongst them those characters that are interesting in themselves, and that also possess an enduring human interest; if, in studying these interesting personalities, you have severely selected, from the mass of their sayings and doings and impulses, those words and deeds and tendencies which mark them at once as individuals and as types; if you have then recast and re-imagined all the materials; if you have cunningly shaped them into a story of progressive and accumulative action; if you have done all this, though you may not have used a single word but what is spoken in ordinary American intercourse to-day, I will venture to say that you have written a piece of live American literature."

## II

All of our literary men have been interested in the theatre. One of the Dunlap publications<sup>2</sup> gives opening addresses in verse written by Washington Irving, Fitz-Greene Halleck, Bret Harte, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and others on occasions when theatres were opened. Percy Mackaye is a recent type of the occasional poet, having read lines when the corner-stone for the New Theatre was laid. But our literary men, whether of America or of England, have always had a hidden contempt for the theatre. This was largely because they identified drama with the theatrical life which supports it. Washington Irving's interest in the theatre brought

<sup>1</sup> See a lecture by Jones delivered at Yale University, entitled "Literature and the Modern Drama;" published in the *Atlantic*, December, 1906, pp. 796-807.

<sup>2</sup> No. 3, 1867.

him in close touch with John Howard Payne, who was abetted in his career by Edmund Kean. Payne had not only been an actor himself, becoming a friend of Talma, but he was brought up in the school of Home's "Douglas."

John Augustus Stone (1801-1834),<sup>1</sup> likewise, was an actor, and approached playwriting from the inside. His "Metamora" took the prize offered by Forrest for the best American play. Where this actor was beneficial to the native playwright was in the fact that he paid well for what he wanted, while the American manager of that day could bring plays from England, or translate continental successes, with little or no expense.

Forrest stood sponsor for Richard Penn Smith, author of "Caius Marius," and likewise presented Robert Montgomery Bird's (1803-1854) "The Gladiator" (1831) in a bold and impressive manner. The Philadelphia physician, who was likewise a novelist, wrote in addition "The Broker of Bogota."<sup>2</sup> But perhaps Forrest's most powerful representation, because of its democratic spirit, was his rôle in Robert T. Conrad's (1810-1858)<sup>3</sup> "Jack Cade; or, The Bondman of Kent" (1868), a play of patriotic scope. His acting in this piece was fierce with "the most intense feeling of the wrongs and charms of the oppressed common people." One contemporary account speaks of his being "a sort of dramatic Demosthenes, rousing the cowardly and slum-

<sup>1</sup> Stone produced a tragedy "Fauntleroy," Charleston, S. C.; he also wrote "The Demoniac;" "Tancred;" "The Restoration; or, The Diamond Cross;" "The Ancient Briton" (1833); and "The Golden Fleece." He killed himself.

<sup>2</sup> His other dramas were "Oraloosa" (1832); "The Cowled Lover;" "Caridorf." See Wemyss: "Twenty-six Years of the Life of an Actor."

<sup>3</sup> Conrad was a Philadelphia lawyer. James E. Murdoch presented his "Conrad of Naples" (1832). "Jack Cade" was first given by Addams as "Aylmere." Conrad accepted many political offices.

berous hosts of mankind to redeem themselves with their own right hands."

The only connection Forrest had with Willis was to horse-whip him in Washington Square, New York, for some scandal in the divorce suit then pending between the actor and his wife. Whatever claims Willis had dramatically were furthered by Wallack. But there is no doubt that among the closet-dramatists, Willis may be taken as a notable example, criticised in a contemporary fashion by Poe. Most literary men of the period essayed drama: Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810)<sup>1</sup> with "Alcuin" (1797); John Neal (1793-1876) with "Otho" (1819); George P. Morris (1802-1864) with "The Maid of Saxony" (1842); Thomas H. Chivers (1807-1858) with "The Sons of Usna" (1858); W. W. Story (1819-1895) with "Nero" (1875) and with "Stephania" (1875).<sup>2</sup>

George Henry Boker (1823-1890) was the most important of the Philadelphia group, a man of leisure, a scholar, and one whose culture was more exact and polished than his passion was sincere. Hans Breitman (C. G. Leland) speaks of Boker's boyhood, when he manifested such remarkable poetic talents that Forrest, in a broad flood of enthusiasm, characterized him as the best reader in America. At Princeton, Boker gratified every artistic taste, and gathered in his room those students whose interests were distinctly literary.

He then studied law, and traveled abroad until 1847. As early as this, Bayard Taylor recognized in him a close and sympathetic friend. In the following years, Boker wrote assiduously, and his devotion to the Union cause during the Civil War is seen in the numberless "Poems of the War" which came from his pen. In 1871, Boker began

<sup>1</sup> A two-volume *Life of Brown* was written by William Dunlap.

<sup>2</sup> See Wegelin and Roden.

his diplomatic service, being sent by President Grant to Constantinople. He was transferred in 1875 to St. Petersburg, where he gained much popularity during a two years' service.

All this time, his poetic talents were variously directed toward the stage. He was the author of "Calaynos," a tragedy given at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London, the year after its publication in 1848. "Francesca da Rimini" (1853)<sup>1</sup> is his most famous piece, and is most deserving of consideration in a theatrical sense. Boker's art temperament is well measured in the following from the pen of Richard Henry Stoddard:

"There was no such word as fail in his bright lexicon, wherein failure was hammered into success. I was not surprised to learn therefore [March, 1853] . . . that he had a new tragedy on the anvil. 'You will laugh at this,' he wrote, 'but the thing is so; "Francesca da Rimini" is the title. Of course you know the story — every one does; but you, nor any one else, do not know it as I have treated it. I have great faith in the successful issue of this new attempt. I think all day, and write all night. This is one of my peculiarities, by the bye: a subject seizes me, soul and body, which accounts for the rapidity of my execution. My muse resembles a whirlwind: she catches me up, hurries me along, and drops me all breathless at the end of her career.' The great heat at which 'Lear' and 'Julius Cæsar' were probably written, at which we know 'The Prisoner of Chillon' was written, at which 'A Blot in the 'Scutcheon' is said to have been written, were inherent in the dramatic genius of

<sup>1</sup> He also wrote "Anne Boleyn," "Leonor de Guzman," "The Betrothal," and "The Widow's Marriage." He was one of the founders of the Union League Club, in Philadelphia. For biographical data, etc., see *Critic*, Jan. 11, 1890; *Critic*, April 12, 1890; *Critic*, April 14, 1888 (G. P. Lathrop); *Lippincott*, June, 1890 (R. H. Stoddard); *Atlantic*, March, 1890 (Contributor's Club).



Boker, from whom, at the end of nineteen days, I received another letter, which I found very interesting: 'Now that "Francesca da Rimini" is done, all but the polishing, I have time to look around and see how I have been neglecting my friends during my state of possession. Of course you wish to know my opinion of the bantling: I shall suppose you do, at all events. Well, then, I am better satisfied with "Francesca da Rimini" than with any of my previous plays. It is impossible for me to say what you, or the world, will say of it; but if it do not please you both, I do not know what I am about. The play is more dramatic than former ones, fiercer in its displays of intense passions, and, so far as mere poetry goes, not inferior, if not superior, to any of them. In this play I have dared more, risked more, than I ever had courage to do before. *Ergo*, if it be not a great triumph, it will certainly be a great failure. I doubt whether you in a hundred guesses could hit upon the manner in which I have treated the story. I shall not attempt to prejudice you regarding the play; I would rather have you judge for yourself, even if your decision be adverse. Am I not the devil and all for rapid composition? My speed frightens me, and makes me fearful of the merits of my work. Yet on coolly going over my work, I find little to object to, either as to the main design or its details; I touch up, here and there, but I do little more. The reason for my rapid writing is that I never attempt putting pen to paper before my design is perfectly matured. I never start with one idea, trusting to the glow of poetical composition for the remainder. That will do in lyrical poetry, but it would be death and damnation to dramatic. But just think of it!—Twenty-eight hundred lines in about three weeks! To look back upon such labor is appalling! Let me give you the whole history of my manner of composition in a few words. If it be not interesting to you, you differ from

me, and I mistake the kind of matters that interest you. While I am writing, I eat little, I drink nothing, I meditate my work, literally, all day. By the time night arrives, I am in a highly nervous and excited state. About nine o'clock, I begin writing and smoking, and I continue the two exercises, *pari passu*, until about four o'clock in the morning. Then I reel to bed, half-crazy with cigar-smoke and poesy, sleep five hours, and begin the next day as the former. Ordinarily, I sleep from seven to eight hours, but when I am writing, but five, — simply because I cannot sleep any longer at such times. The consequence of this mode of life is, that at the end of a long work I sink at once like a spent horse, and have not energy enough to perform the ordinary duties of life. I *feel* my health giving way under it, but really I do not care. I am ambitious to be numbered among the martyrs.'"

Loyal as Stoddard was to his friend, we find him writing in this critical vein:

"The conception of his tragedies and comedies, their development, their movement, and their catastrophes, are dramatic. Poetical, they are not overweighted with poetry; emotional and passionate, their language is naturally figurative, and the blank verse rises and falls as the occasion demands. One feels in reading them that the writer had studied the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, and that they harmed as well as helped him. If he could have forgotten them and remembered only his own genius, his work would have been more original. A born dramatist, he was a genuine balladist, as I could prove by comparing his ballads with those of Macaulay; and a born sonneteer, as I could prove by comparing his sonnets with those of Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, and Shakespeare."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Francesca da Rimini" was first produced at the old Broadway Theatre in 1855, with E. L. Davenport and Mme. Ponisi; revived

Boker's "Francesca da Rimini" is a peculiarly contradictory piece of work, since, from the standpoint of the stage, it is essentially and effectively dramatic, while as literature, it is mediocre and badly imitative of the Elizabethan style. So imbued was Boker with the method of his models, that he often paralleled Shakespeare, his poetic imagery being imitative, and his phraseology disappointingly colloquial. Yet over and above the mere story, Boker has succeeded in depicting distinct character, especially in his dwarf, *Pepé*. The historical setting is slight, yet sufficient to localize the piece, and the *dramatis personæ* are faithful in outline, though oftentimes devoid of consuming passion.

Should you take the different versions of the Francesca legend, based on Dante's episodical mention of it in "The Divine Comedy," it would be found that Phillips, as a dramatist, has the fault of being diffuse, while Boker is prosaic and plain. Were it not for over-elaboration, D'Annunzio's play might have supplanted all others on the same subject, because of its Italian spirit. Could we draw from Phillips his simple lyricism, from D'Annunzio his intensity, from Boker his proportion, and from Marion Crawford his realization of the true situation, toned away from melodrama, then the ideal play might be constructed. But Boker is thoroughly actable, and is not unworthy of revival.

The attitude toward the closet-drama is purely one of culture. A pseudo-interest in the grandiloquent style has resulted in that separation of literature from the dramatic form, and as soon as one realizes that literature is inherent in the substance and in the structure, so soon will ornamen-

by Lawrence Barrett and Marie Wainwright, at McVickar's Theatre, Chicago, Nov. 6, 1882, and by Otis Skinner, William Norris, and Marcia Van Dresser, at the Grand Opera House, Chicago, August 22, 1901. After the success of the piece in 1882, Boker wrote to Barrett: "Why did n't I receive this encouragement twenty years ago? Then I might have done something."

tation cease to be strung in useless festoons upon the necessary dialogue. For in all plays there is essential talk even as there are Sarcey's *scènes à faire*. It is a false idea of culture that created a false idea of closet-drama. For though the theatre is based on imitation, it cannot abide a misuse of its essential structure in order to be called literature. More than any other critic, Professor Brander Matthews has persisted, in his writings, that the drama must comply with the practical demands of the playhouse in order to be drama. Pointing to the body of dramaturgy which has come down to us, he has been firm in his claim that "only literature is permanent." And so, we arrive at the same conclusion which shall come to us in a consideration of the poetic drama. We will accept drama in any form, just so it be drama first of all.

## CHAPTER V

### BRONSON HOWARD: DEAN OF THE AMERICAN DRAMA

As Dean of the American Drama, Bronson Howard occupies a most significant position. The theatre is a very sensitive barometer, registering current ideas and local manners, and if one should range Mrs. Mowatt's "Fashion" (1847), Mrs. Bateman's "Self" (1856), and Mr. Howard's "Saratoga" (1870) side by side, the timely differences would be very strikingly felt. The point of view held by Mr. Howard just before his death had a broad sweep toward the future and a very vital sweep along the past. For, in respect to the latter position, he was able to estimate the value of that dramatic soil and of those dramatic traditions from which he sprung; he was so situated that he could step aside from the main current, and note wherein the later drama had profited by its inheritance.

It is unfortunate that in the years to come, the estimate of Mr. Howard, based upon his numerous popular successes, will not be a very high one, even though "The Banker's Daughter" and "Aristocracy" are marked with a certain literary quality. This stricture is partly due to the fact that he wrote at a time when our American stage was flooded with French imitations or importations; when, as Mr. Howard himself declared, adaptations for the English speaking stage not only meant a change to English life and English characters, but meant also that in the transference, these

characters continued "to express foreign ideas and to act like foreigners."

But Mr. Howard's right to the title of Dean of the American Drama can never be disputed, for, whatever is done in the future to enrich our native dramaturgic literature, it will have been through the efforts of Mr. Howard that the first impetus toward that efflorescence was given. In the early seventies he stood single-handed, with the Anglicism and classicism of Daly, Palmer, and Wallack as his chiefest opposition, and he forced the public gaze upon current thought and manners. So as to accomplish this object, he was obliged to have recourse to conventions more French than they were American. What is of most importance is that Mr. Howard by his plays established the *fact* of the American drama's existence — plays in a way far more native than those romantic pieces by George Boker and the Philadelphia group. It is an unfortunate possibility, however, that unless our dramatic literature emphasizes the essential elements from which our national drama has come, Mr. Howard in the future will be little more than a name to theatre-goers, outside of the profession. For his plays are hardly literary in the sense that they possess reading style or grace. That is to be deplored, inasmuch as Mr. Howard, intellectually, was of a high type of mind, while as Dean he always supported that which aimed to be the best.

It were futile indeed to regard Mr. Howard as a producing playwright from any other angle of vision than that of his day. His technique, his observation, his *locale*, are of a generation that is gone; and though the humanity of his characters still retain acting possibilities, the American drama of to-day is subject to far different influences. We are now passing through the fires of scientific query and realistic handling of the sex question. Dion Boucicault, as recent as 1890, only vaguely felt that there was something in Ibsen

which demanded what he called serious regard. Long before this storm and stress period in stage history, Mr. Howard's method was so far crystallized as to remain unaffected by later technique. And toward the latter part of his life, it was curious to behold in him a man intellectually so far in advance of his method of writing. For, despite Ibsen and Zola and Tolstoi; despite Howells and James and Meredith; despite Pinero and Jones and Shaw, Mr. Howard's last comedy, "Kate," is untouched by current influences, however much it strove to be modern. In this play his ideas of life deepened, his technical grasp became firmer, his insight keener, but his discussions were all clad in form typical of "The Banker's Daughter," "One of Our Girls," and "The Henrietta."

Before 1870, the American Drama was very broadly and very crudely manipulated in two directions: American history and the American type were chiefly to be reckoned with. We find long lists of Indian plays, of Revolutionary dramas, of spectaculars unfolding the marvels of colonization and the successes of 1812. These early pieces are all forgotten, save one perhaps — the "Metamora" of Judge Stone, so closely identified with the personality of Edwin Forrest. The Indian plays, as a *genre*, before 1846, were not, however, any more common than the American types which dominated the boards in such mushroom thickness that the elder Hackett followed one play of the kind with another; and his rival actor, Hill, became popularly known as "Yankee" Hill.

It is customary for the dramatic historian of to-day to discount the influence of the character type on the American stage — a type which disappeared usually with the passing of the actor who created it. But the value of W. J. Florence's *Bardwell Slote*, of John T. Raymond's *Mulberry Sellers*, of Murdoch's and Mayo's *Davy Crockett*, of Chan-

frau's *Mose*, and of Jefferson's *Asa Trenchard*, lay in the fact that they helped to create in the minds of theatre-goers a belief in national distinctions; they helped to preserve American characteristics on the stage, however cartoon the pictures might have been. All drama must thus work itself out from extravagance to refinement.

When Mr. Howard began to write for the theatre, the influence of Scribe, and his manner of unfolding plot and counterplot, had not yet been succeeded by a more natural method of development. Dumas,  *fils*, with "*Camille*," had injected into the romantic play of intrigue and infidelity, a species of emotional analysis which was somehow mistaken for an ethical purpose. Furthermore, Robertson and Taylor, borrowing freely from the elder Dumas and Hugo on one hand, and from the comedy of incident and manner on the other, simply Anglicized the French form of drama for the English stage. Mr. Howard found such to be the conditions when he began his struggles.

He found that English managers realized it was less expensive, and involved less risk, to employ Boucicault,<sup>1</sup> for example, to translate French plays, to *adapt* them, as they phrased it, than to experiment with a new play that had never been tried upon the public. He found that in America the situation was very much the same. Popular opinion was led to value an importation, and to discount any serious treatment of American character or of American life. He found, finally, that there was only half-hearted interest in the American drama on the part of two of the leading managers of that era, however much they might write encouragingly of the subject in current reviews or in their reminiscences. Lester Wallack in no way encouraged native talent, even though his excellence as a stage manager helped to give the

<sup>1</sup> See my "Famous Actor-Families in America" for a chapter on "The Boucicaults."



theatre an abundant amount of English comedy and tragedy; even though he was author of a local play called "Central Park."<sup>1</sup> The same may well be claimed of Augustin Daly, who nevertheless aimed to be American in "Under the Gaslight." But his was likewise a foreign ambition, for he mounted adaptations of French and German farces whenever he wished to depart from the Shakespearean or classical comedy repertoire of his New York theatres; he catered distinctively to culture, and how well he succeeded is measured by the atmosphere which for so long a while after his death clung to his Broadway playhouse at Thirtieth Street.

Of the three prominent managers, A. M. Palmer may be said to have done the most to have encouraged native dramatic ability. He and Mr. Daly were both involved in the development of Bronson Howard.

Such is the setting to aid us in claiming for this writer the full appropriateness of the title: Dean of the American Drama. Mr. Howard was born at Detroit in 1842, during a time when that city was considered the extreme West. To undertake a journey there from the East was a notable accomplishment, and in one of James Fenimore Cooper's numerous autobiographical references, we find him boasting of the feat. In the "Leatherstocking" series, moreover, one of the characters was based on Mr. Howard's father — a man of adventurous nature, of firm disposition and determination — a man, in fine, of the pioneer type. The intense American strain in this family reaches back as far as 1759, when one of the Howards came over from England with Wolfe's army, and, strange to say, almost immediately began to realize that the colonies were right in their attitude toward the mother-country. This sympathy increased to such an extent that Howard enlisted with the "rebel" forces during

<sup>1</sup> See my "Famous Actor-Families in America" for a chapter on "The Wallacks."

the Revolution — an act that resulted in his death on the field at Monmouth, New Jersey.

Mr. Howard's grandfather was quick to catch the Westward spirit, though loath to break from the East. He was a roving farmer who moved from Howard's Settlement on Lake Ontario, thence to a point in New York State, near the St. Lawrence River, and he instilled into his own son that same instinct to migrate which had prompted the Revolutionary sire to roam from place to place.

Mr. Howard's father was a commission merchant in Detroit at the time of his son's birth. He had been a captain of a schooner in the days when sea-faring encouraged mutinous crews — composed mostly of a cursing, grog-beset, brutal type of sailor. But Howard, Sr., was of a different calibre from most sea commanders. He banished the freedom of oaths from the deck; he cleared the lockers and holds of all grog; he insisted upon discipline which his friends told him could never be maintained where grog was denied. His actions as commander hastened the establishment of liquor regulations in the maritime service, and abolished from its prominent position on deck the water-cooler which had up to this time been filled with grog for anyone who cared to turn the faucet. His immediate reward was that he obtained differential rates of insurance which other seamen coveted, but were denied. Bronson Howard was proud of this bit of family history.

Without giving up entire interest in the ship business, Howard, Sr., joined the firm of Alvin Bronson and Company, Bronson, after whom the young man was named, being at one time State Senator at Albany from Oswego County. In some of the early playbills we find the full name of the dramatist recorded as Bronson Crocker Howard, Mr. Crocker being another partner of the firm. Many of his journalistic friends used to address him as B. C. Howard, though he

preferred the shorter form as more distinctive and individualistic.

From 1842 to 1858, therefore, young Howard remained in Detroit, long enough to secure the rudiments of an education, to see his father Mayor of the city (1849), and to develop what his father bequeathed him — an inventive taste which expanded later and aided him, when ingenuity was required of him behind the scenes at the theatre.

Howard, Sr., was accustomed to whittle rough vessels from blocks of wood; this we may consider as symbol of the mechanical side of dramatic construction. In fact, before the Prismatic Club of Detroit, Mr. Howard once claimed that the mechanical engineer and the dramatist required essentially the same technical training. He afterwards, before the students of Harvard University, reasserted this, in connection with his play, "The Banker's Daughter."

Young Howard was now sent East to prepare for Yale, — the class of 1865; but though General Russell's preparatory school did its work successfully, nature went against the scheme, and Howard's eyes failed him in 1860. Later, he was granted the privilege of attending a few lectures with his class, but he was never able to matriculate.

During this time, the written drama as a profession was farthest from his thoughts. He had manufactured a few skits for his school, and had become unswerving in his determination not to enter a trade. In fact, stimulated by the books and by the lecturing of Bayard Taylor, Howard was bent on becoming a writer. With this phase we must now deal, for it will indicate how subtly and how surely natural inclination asserts itself. Unknowingly, we are led whither our tastes prompt us, and Howard's first literary effort, based upon a purely literary enthusiasm for the then recently published American translation of "Les Misérables," proved to be a play.

With all the confidence of youth, he persuaded a manager to let him attempt a drama called "Fantine," based on some of the Hugo incidents. It was played by a local stock company, managed according to the custom of the day. The "star" was the only one to travel, going from one city to another, in each of which a stock company was ready to support him. When written, this crude first attempt was found to be unfit for the practical side of the theatre; with all the inexperience of the inexperienced amateur, Howard had expanded the first act until it was sufficiently long to be a play in itself. But, undaunted, he set about pruning and cutting. What man can ever expect to become a playwright without that energetic willingness to slave, labor, and hope? Mr. Howard always possessed to a large degree the unfailing optimism of the true craftsman, and he once said, after he had gone through thirty-eight years of theatre service: "I never can understand the doubts as to whether one can do a play, if he really has it in him; he just goes and does it without questioning." This determination which Mr. Howard always preached was an inspiration to his younger associates, and to many of them he used to say, "When you find yourself standing in the way of dramatic truth, clear the track!"

An interesting state of affairs existed in those days, excellently illustrated by the fate of "Fantine." This play was never published; in fact, for a long while Mr. Howard considered the manuscript as lost. The only trace of it to be had was a "skeleton" copy which it was customary to give to the prompter: that is, the play with all the leading parts omitted, and only the cues as a guide. This "skeleton" precaution was necessary because of the copyright weakness which allowed all kinds of piracy to be committed in the profession. There were slight means of protecting the author's property in those days, a fact which added to Mr.

Howard's interest in the dramatic copyright debates. Under such conditions, it would never do to allow the prompter to have in his possession the entire manuscript. The "skeleton" was of small value to Mr. Howard; but fortunately, the "leads" being extant, they turned up unexpectedly some years after, and were dropped into the setting like missing stones in a mosaic.

The eventful year of 1864, therefore, found Bronson Howard making a start as playwright. Another interest was drawing him to the stage, for he was serving a Detroit paper as dramatic critic and besides, was reading plays for his own amusement, familiarizing himself with the historical development of playwriting, which is a necessary acquisition for dignified theatre work.

These were war times, but young Howard does not seem to have been drawn into the vortex, until it was rumored that an invasion of the Union was to be attempted by the English from Canada. For several nights, in consequence, Howard tramped the shores of the Lake, waiting in the darkness for momentary attack, and experiencing all the excitement that comes before a battle. There was no invasion, so he left Detroit in 1865, and landed in the *Tribune* office, New York, where he was detailed as reporter to write up the novel opening of the season at Coney Island. From 1867, intermittently until 1872, Howard attended isolated lectures, but most of his energies were expended on journalism, in a day when newspapers were being quickly founded, and were as rapidly changing hands.

In the usual journalistic career, which, as we have said, is so characteristic of many of our native playwrights, Mr. Howard's history is exceptional. For he was trained in a newspaper school that produced Whitelaw Reid, and from 1868 to 1872 he was filling varied positions on many editorial staffs. He received his first honorarium as dramatic critic,

under Charles H. Sweetzer, who founded *The Round Table*, a precursor of *The Nation*, and was next sent to report the Yale commencement and the Yale-Harvard boat race, for the *Evening Gazette*. It was while on the latter paper that one of his associate reporters was assigned a notable task — to follow up and describe how the first bag of mail was brought to New York from Philadelphia, an incident which was the beginning of the post-office system on its present gigantic scale.

Howard then followed Sweetzer to his new paper, *The Mail*, assuming the nominal office of first president of the Mail Association. But the paper was sold in 1870, and John Russell Young then employed Howard on the *Tribune*, making him exchange editor. Toward the latter part of 1871, he went over to the *Post*, continuing his journalistic career, despite his intervening dramatic ventures, through 1876, during which year he wrote Centennial articles for the *London Pall Mall Magazine*, and for the *Detroit Free Press*. Before this, however, his determination had been firmly settled to devote all of his energies to the drama. It was probably about this time that his intimacy with Mr. (now Sir) Charles Wyndham began. The latter's first managerial venture occurred in "Hurricanes," which, written by Mr. Howard, was renamed "Truth" in James Albery's adaptation for England. In 1880, Miss Wyndham became Mrs. Bronson Howard.

Despite the lethargic state in which Mr. Howard found the American dramatist, and despite the absolute inertia of the American drama itself, he entered the contest with great energy. So thoroughly were foreign models dominant on the boards that he later confessed how one of his earliest manuscripts contained speeches in which Newport people went about exclaiming "Egad!" in real eighteenth century style. Mr. Howard was always fully aware of the historical changes



*Photo. by Marcetti*

RACHEL CROTHERS





in drama, the shifting of social attitudes, of moral conventionalities. Every dramatist, unless he be distinctly a reformer, is loath to overstep such conventionalities. Mrs. Inchbald, in one of her dramatic prefaces, refers to playwrights of her day as being far behind the period in method and in subject matter; yet at the same time she was astounded to find Mrs. Centilever utilizing the *clergy* in one of her plays! It took years for the stage minister to make his appearance in society drama.

Mr. Howard once said that in Rachel Crothers' "The Three of Us," such a heroine as is there portrayed — one who enters a man's room at midnight, to outface his threats and to outwit his claim that he will compromise her — was thirty or forty years in coming. Augustus Thomas has announced that he held "The Witching Hour" in his desk for several seasons, waiting the psychological moment when public sentiment would be alive to the truth of hypnotism. Ibsen trained us all to an acceptance of heredity as a stage subject, and he confessed in his correspondence that he was willing and anxious to shock average conservatism, without waiting for the opportune time to do things. He was always in advance of his public; hence his isolation and loneliness; hence the storms of protest raised against him. This only indicates the sensitiveness to dramatic change.

Mr. Howard accepted theatrical convention as it existed in 1870; his one and only fight was for the recognition of the American dramatist. Just before Robertson held sway in the early sixties on the English stage, the old style drama was in the ascendancy; nineteenth century people were viewing and were accepting manners of another era. But Robertson gave a twist to such a state of affairs; the theatre pendulum swung back to its normal balance, and though he did not entirely free himself of the foreign yoke and of the earlier romantic influence, Robertson at least focussed the

glass upon contemporary condition. This accounts for such a play as "Caste"; it explains many touches in the dramas by Bronson Howard.

From "Saratoga" (1870) to "Kate" (1906), Mr. Howard dealt with American character, largely in the midst of foreign atmosphere. The advance from the same "Saratoga" to his "Aristocracy" (1892), was only an advance in neatness and closeness of dialogue. That feminine brightness which drew down upon him the wrath of contemporary critics, was admirably adapted, as it was in the case of Clyde Fitch, to the French treatment. But the Anglo-French background detracts from the sincerity of American drama. Yet, should one look closer, and not judge by externals entirely, it will be seen, in the case of Mr. Howard, that in spite of the prejudice against American dramatists and American themes, in spite of the exoteric character of his technique, of his construction, he anticipated many of our present-day dramatic workers in the selection of his themes.

"The Young Mrs. Winthrop" (1882), however stereotyped in its adherence to the "aside," is a domestic play of strong import, by the side of which Alfred Sutro's "The Walls of Jericho" is no more powerful arraignment of society forces drawing husband and wife apart. "Moorcroft," though it failed, exhibited Mr. Howard as aware of the value of timeliness in theatre work. He had witnessed the instantaneous effect of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and had noticed the melodramatic success of Boucicault's "The Octoroon." It is natural, therefore, that this "Moorcroft," based on a story by John Hay, should have dealt with the slave trade in similar melodramatic manner.

"Baron Rudolph" (1881) foreshadowed by many years the stage treatment of the struggle between capital and labor, so crudely handled by Charles Klein in "The Daughters of Men." Then there was "The Henrietta" (1887), to my

mind one of Mr. Howard's most characteristically American plays, — barring a few out-of-date touches, — which might very well be classed with "The Lion and the Mouse," Frank Norris's "The Pit" (dramatized by Channing Pollock), and "Business is Business" ("Les Affaires sont les Affaires") in which Crane acted. In claiming this distinction of *previousness* for Mr. Howard, it must always be borne in mind that his was pioneer treatment, which won its way in the face of managerial prejudice and productive barrenness. "Shenandoah" later became the forerunner of such a superior drama as William Gillette's "Secret Service."

Mr. Howard's progress toward the recognized position of *dean* of his profession was by no means a rapid or an easy one. I have before me accusations of diverse kinds registered against the dramatist, for there were many critics who could not see originality in any of his work. In 1874, when "Saratoga" (Anglicized "Brighton" by Frank Marshall) was presented in London, the *Times* loudly proclaimed that the play was simply a recast of Scribe's "Les Eaux." Mr. Howard protested vigorously in the newspaper columns, yet he was dignifiedly silent when critics pointed to his "Diamonds" (1872), and discovered in it distinct reflections of "Still Waters Run Deep"; or claimed that the charming sentiment in "Old Love Letters" was akin in form and feeling to Gilbert's "Sweethearts."

Despite the fact, for example, that a certain special reviewer was proverbially harsh in his judgments of Mr. Howard, hinting that "One of Our Girls" (1885) leaned upon "A Scrap of Paper" in its third act, and upon "The School for Scandal" in its fourth act, should one follow those reviews, there would be detected that with the appearance of each new play by Mr. Howard, increasing credit and respect were bestowed upon him. This was largely due to the maturity of the dramatist's touch — to the surety of his technique.

To his feminine interest, Mr. Howard added a repartee which came from close observation of small detail. At first, in such pieces as "Saratoga," and later, in "One of Our Girls," the style bordered on the frivolous. It seemed that there was but one way for him to picture the American girl: by making her, amidst the conservatism of English convention, a bold, frank, "natural" type, surprising everyone with her freedom, her boisterousness. There was little of the intensive life to be detected in her struggles, in her marital misunderstandings, unless we except "The Young Mrs. Winthrop."

The formula of imported drama was used by Mr. Howard; in order to win his battle, he was obliged to compromise somewhere. The formula prescribed duels and French indiscretions; it necessitated the American characters being lavish with money. A certain grace was bestowed upon the feminine type, but otherwise the manner of depiction was the same as that used by Taylor in his character portrayal of *Asa Trenchard*.

The social amenities, the comedies and tragedies of smart set life, are to-day very much as they were yesterday. We find as many of the *nouveau riche*, anxious to pepper conversation with French phrases, as many of the so-called aristocracy boasting of association with titled folk; and there are still to be seen the destitute foreign noblemen — mere fortune-hunters such as Mr. Howard introduced into "Aristocracy" and "Kate." Snobbery has lost none of its rampant coarseness. Yet we have outgrown this cartoon, this farce element, in depicting American condition on the stage; we seek for less of the incongruous.

Wall Street is just as potent a factor in the shattering of homes as it was when "The Henrietta" was first produced; but the framework of social drama, of the problem play, is now more solid, and less prone to be shaped by the caprice

of external incident. Mr. Howard, despite the transitory chat of his dialogue, impresses one with the feeling that beneath the surface incident there lay a very distinct idea — a much more substantial view of life than his execution would lead us to believe. His criticism of American condition was always thorough and just, and his culture sense was so keen that it is surprising to find how little his plays reflect the solid character of his intellect. His dramas were mostly received with enthusiasm, netting him a comfortable fortune. Yet, regarding their permanence there is doubt, for the very reason that they are cast in a mould so easily discarded, a mould which held only the froth of manners.

As a worker, Mr. Howard was always zealous and painstaking. His manuscripts indicate that labor and sacrifice are the dramatist's watchwords. Let a doubt as to effectiveness once possess him, and he went to any amount of trouble to overcome the scenic difficulty. The well-thumbed volumes on the Civil War in his library were evidence of his care in detail while planning "Shenandoah," the first draft of which was a network of emendations.

He wrote and re-wrote a scene in "One of Our Girls" six times before he could prove to his own satisfaction that the original way was the only way for his particular purpose. The lecture he delivered at Harvard University, in 1886, applied the general laws of drama to certain alterations made in "The Banker's Daughter." His object was to show the student that whatever changes of primary importance were made by him, affected other details in preceding and succeeding situations. A drama is an organism, with relative spatial values fluctuating according to dynamic principles. Mechanical effectiveness has its constructive equation, and character must develop consistently along lines of evolution and of life.

But Mr. Howard, while illustrating these laws by means

of the changes in his piece, also too clearly revealed in that lecture a distinct danger underlying the stagecraft of his day — a danger bequeathed us by the French, and engrafted by Robertson and Taylor upon English drama and American drama as well — a danger counteracted by the Ibsen technique, with its vital ideas. The caprice of incident was more thought of than the humanity of individuals; artifice therefore largely took the place of art. "One of the most important laws of dramatic construction," said Mr. Howard before the Harvard audience, "might thus be formulated: If you want a particular thing done, choose a character to do it that an audience will naturally expect to do it. In 'The Banker's Daughter' I wanted a man to fall in love with my heroine after she was a married woman, and, of course, I chose a French Count for the purpose."

We now ask again, in view of all this activity, by what right is Mr. Howard called Dean of the American Dramatists? He always had the interest of native playwrights at heart; he fought for them unceasingly, even as ardently as Mark Twain did for the author in the copyright agitations, making appeal for proper protection of plays as early as 1879; he founded for his craft a permanent organization, known as the Dramatist Club. But more than that, he established the *fact* of the American drama's existence, and stood ready to render encouragement to the younger generation. Unlike "The Master Builder," he hastened the newer school, always gracious and always helpful.

We emphasize in our literary histories the importance of such writers as Bret Harte, who preserved a native flavor in the short story, dependent upon native life. The American idea in literature has largely been subservient to local interest and local need. Politically, socially, spiritually, and economically, locality has governed our literary expression, and has been externalized on the stage. Save in isolated instan-

ces, *idea* in American literature has in no way equalled vividness of local condition. While Mr. Howard's local claim was harmed by his manner of construction, he nevertheless, like Robertson and Taylor, swung the pendulum across the dial of contemporary life, and reflected the conventional phases of contemporary society. He recognized that Boker in Philadelphia had done no ordinary work; that American drama, from the Revolution, was no insignificant quantity, however varying the quality. What was needed seemed to be *confidence* in native ability and in native discernment; what was needed proved to be a local dramatic *market* for modern wares. Mr. Howard was the founder of such a market. It was confidence on his part that cleared the way for the present. And by right of this struggle, dramatic history should stamp him, as others in his family have been stamped, as *pioneer* in his particular field.

## NOTE

Mr. Howard died in 1908. His plays appeared in the following order, the star indicating that they have been published in French's "Standard Drama":

"Fantine" (1864), "Saratoga" (1870), "Diamonds" (1872), "Moorcroft; or, The Double Wedding" (1874), "Hurricanes" (1878, — called "Truth" in England), "Old Love Letters" \* (1878), "The Banker's Daughter" \* (1878 — called in England "The Old Love and the New"; also known as "Lillian's Last Love"), "Baron Rudolph" (1881), "Young Mrs. Winthrop" \* (1882), "One of Our Girls" \* (1885), "Met by Chance" (1887), "The Henrietta" \* (1887), "Shenandoah" \* (1889), "Aristocracy" \* (1892), "Kate" \* (1906 — Harper & Bros.).

In 1879, Mr. Howard also wrote "Wives," in which scenes from Molière's "L'École de Maris" and "L'École des Femmes" were blended. He likewise wrote "Peter Stuyvesant" (1899), in conjunction with Professor Brander Matthews. In the casts presenting the comedies we note such names as Sara Jewett, W. J. LeMoyne, J. H. Stoddart, George Clarke, Henry Miller, Agnes Booth, E. H. Sothorn, Viola Allen, and Wilton Lackaye. The early actors were the most important, and they included Fanny Davenport, Clara Morris, and their contemporaries.

## CHAPTER VI

### JAMES A. HERNE AND THE REALISTIC DRAMA

IT is rarely that the American people have touched the soil in literature, but when they have, the result has been of the most distinctive order. As a nation, we are too young to have realized any large and original problems in literature. Our authors have been more or less imitators of English models, and even to-day our stage is attempting to explain American conditions by means of a technique which is not a native technique. We have perhaps brought the short story to a stage of perfection which can only be equaled by a few of the French writers; but our poetry has been largely imitative, our essays reminiscent of the eighteenth century flavor in England, and our fiction by no means fraught with the full value of American life and American characteristics.

The same may be said of American drama, although at the present time there is a decided tendency on the part of the popular dramatist to deal with subjects that are closely related to the lives of American audiences. The position which W. D. Howells occupies is assuredly one of the most original impulses evident in the recent history of American letters. He has been the means of educating the people away from the stereotyped formulas of romanticism; and while he has done much to create a realistic *rut* in fiction, he has nevertheless enforced the undoubted fact that there is as much richness, if not indeed more truth, in the common life of the land, as in the idealism which has no intimate



relation with the fibre of the community. Unfortunately, we are prone, in our literary criticism, to overlook the work that is being done along the same lines in American drama. Take any handbook of literature, and note how absolutely the activity of the American playwright is ignored. The literary critic has not yet awakened to the fact of the importance of a body of native dramaturgy. Otherwise, did he know the history of playwriting, he would not show so thoroughly his ignorance of one of the rare strains in American drama — as distinctive, as invigorating, and as important as that impulse given by Mr. Howells to American letters. I refer to the solid calibre of the dramas of James A. Herne.

In his book on "Criticism and Fiction," Mr. Howells, speaking of the imitative instinct of the average American writer, says truthfully that in general "he is instructed to idealize his personages, that is, to take the lifelikeness out of them, and put the booklikeness into them." And he adds furthermore, as a hopeful sign, that "now we are beginning to see and to say that no author is an authority, except in those moments when he held his ear close to Nature's lips, and caught her very accents." Probably our universities are overdoing the desire to discount the originality of an author, in the zeal to submit his work to the test of those scientific principles underlying the theory of comparative literature. As far as the sane evaluation of realism is concerned, that author is *real* who faithfully interprets the environment with which he is most familiar. And in this respect, no one can lay better claim to the highest realization of the term than Mr. Herne himself.

Considered in the light of sound standards, he may be said to represent the most original strain that the American drama has produced. Let us grant that in his plots he invents conventional situations which are detrimental to the perfection of his stagecraft. Let us acknowledge that his

comedy is oftentimes low comedy, although his humor is of the very kindest and of the most human quality. Let us furthermore realize fully that, having acted in the old school, having assumed characters of diverse range, Mr. Herne unconsciously resorted to an invention which was more imitative than original. Yet, notwithstanding this, he is entitled to the very highest consideration, because of the fact that in the midst of romantic, melodramatic, and old-fashioned tragic conceptions, which found favor in the eyes of the American public, he put his ear close to the heart of the common life, and drew from the most ordinary experiences the poetry of a simple, fundamental existence.

The surprising characteristic which strikes one after having read Mr. Herne's manuscripts, is the wonderful clarity of vision which, through the medium of the most matter-of-fact details, through the wonderful power of clear and direct expression, could raise the common level of daily existence to the realm of the most tragic drama on the one hand, and to the realm of the most genial, warm-hearted, and pure rural comedy on the other. This is not over-exaggeration or over-enthusiasm, because one cannot help realizing the faults in Mr. Herne's technique, through the very existence in the midst of those faults of the highest type of dramatic literature.

His work, as a whole, is only another illustration of the undoubted fact that American life — the true American life — lies between great cities; that there is more of the native stamina in the small community than in the abnormal community, where a mixture of all nations constitutes the civic body. Mr. Howells has studied the humanity of this intermediate life, and his work is distinctively native; whereas that of Mrs. Edith Wharton is wholly imitative of the English school, as a certain class of life in America is imitative of English life.



*Photo, by J. K. Stevens & Son Co.*

**JAMES A. HERNE**



When Mr. Herne's attention was drawn away from the melodrama with which he had met favor, he seemed to have been prompted by a kind of intuitive realization of what the modern movement in literature was to be. Some would like to say that the influences which were brought to bear upon him at the time he wrote "Margaret Fleming" and "Griffith Davenport" were the foreign influences of such men as Tolstoi and Ibsen; but the impetus given to Mr. Herne was more inward than external. He may be said to have been endowed with that luminosity of spiritual vision which saw the eventual potency of the common life, and which kept him, even at an advanced age, thoroughly attuned to the progressive movements, making him an ardent reader of the philosophic thinkers, as well as a warm adherent of the economic theories of Henry George.

Mr. Herne was born on February 1, 1839, at Cohoes, New York, of Irish parentage, his father, Patrick Herne, being a tradesman of the town. Save for the fact that he received the bare rudiments of an education, Mr. Herne, intellectually as well as materially, may be taken as a type of that self-made man which we Americans rightfully exalt. In his early years he had to earn his livelihood, and this he did in various subordinate positions; while, with the yearning of the average boy, his tastes were turned toward the sea. Though he did not, with the usual inclination of the average boy, slip off and ship upon a merchantman, he retained, until the day of his death, an insatiable love of the water. The rebellion against conditions, however, resulted in his running away at the age of twenty, and joining a theatrical company which was playing at the Adelphi Theatre in Troy. Here he appeared during April, 1859, in "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Upon the authority of Clapp, however, it is said that his first appearance was made in an amateur performance of "Toodles," which took place a short while previous to this

at Schenectady. At the Adelphi he supported James B. Roberts, assuming such characters as *Horatio*, *Cassio*, and *Bassanio*. His uncle was the treasurer of the house.

That Herne was equal to any emergency may be inferred from the fact that one evening, when Roberts appeared as *Richard III*, the young actor was ticketed for the three rôles of *Tressel*, *Oxford*, and *Buckingham*. He was indefatigable in his ambition, although at the time he must have been sorely pressed for the necessary income which would supply him with a theatrical wardrobe. For, during one summer, he returned to a brush factory in the neighborhood of Cohoes, working away to eke out his small salary, at the same time, with the artful enthusiasm of a young man, keeping his father in ignorance of his true profession.

His next engagement was at the Gaiety Theatre in Albany; and from there he went to the Holliday Street Theatre in Baltimore, which was under the management of Ford. There he remained until 1864; and it should be recorded that he likewise played in Washington at the theatre in which Lincoln was killed. In 1869, he was for a period manager of the New York Grand Opera House; and thereafter he toured with Susan Denning along the Pacific slope. Then followed several seasons as leading man with Lucille Western, during which engagement he assumed such parts as *Bill Sykes* and *Sir Francis Levison*, succeeding E. L. Davenport in the repertoire rôles. Mr. Herne's first wife was Miss Helen Western, whom he married on July 17, 1866.

When the actor finally went to Baldwin's Theatre, in San Francisco, it was under the management of Thomas Maguire. He served in the capacity of stage director, as well as assuming an infinite number of rôles, among those to be remembered because of their human unctuousness being his Dickens characterizations of *Daniel Peggotty* and *Captain Cuttle*. It was while serving in this capacity that David Belasco, a

much younger man than Mr. Herne, came under his influence and profited by his training. For though Mr. Belasco had much originality and enthusiasm, his work needed the guidance of such an experienced actor as Mr. Herne. And it may be said that this meeting with Belasco first suggested to the stage manager his own powers as a writer of plays.

From now on, the career of James A. Herne may be considered entirely from the standpoint of his literary development and of his personal expansion. For, peculiarly, events in his life are not so significant as the intimate association with a very few people, who might be said to have acted as much upon his artistic unfolding as any of the subtle forces which are supposed to mould the characters of men. The most important event in Mr. Herne's life, both intellectually and spiritually, was his second marriage with Miss Katherine Corcoran, on April 3, 1878.

As a matter of mere romantic record, it is interesting to note that one evening, during Mr. Herne's engagement in San Francisco and before his second marriage, while he was playing *Bill Sykes*, there was present in the gallery a very much excited and overwrought girl; this happened to be Katherine Corcoran. It is also interesting to read, that in November, 1877, Julia Melville, a dramatic reader, had a pupil of whom she was especially proud, and one whom she was anxious to have Mr. Herne see. So he slipped into the room one morning, to hear this young girl while she was at work; it was Katherine Corcoran. Mrs. Herne's father had fought on the Union side in the Civil War. While still in her teens, she went to California, where after studying, she gained experience in stock at a Portland theatre, thereafter joining James O'Neill and William Seymour at the Baldwin Theatre. One of her initial successes was as *Peg Woffington* in "Masks and Faces."

There was not a move which Mr. Herne was to make in the future that did not bear the impress of her inspiration. She it was who started him definitely on his career as a dramatist; she it was who encouraged him in those hours when, after having written "Margaret Fleming" and "The Rev. Griffith Davenport," he found himself shut off from *all* managerial hearing, because of the fact that he had determined to cut aloof from melodrama and to seek for the truth in the commonplace.

From his career thus hastily sketched, there are a few significant factors to be gleaned. While at the Baldwin Theatre, Mr. Herne came under the influence of the Boucicault drama and of that type of melodrama which was represented by such a success as "The Danicheffs." So that it is not surprising to find "Hearts of Oak," "The Minute Men," and "Drifting Apart" tinged with those large emotions which might almost be said to lack subtlety. Even in "Shore Acres," during the scene in which *Uncle Nat* struggles with *Martin* in his effort to light the signal lamp, the sensational is very much in evidence; but the unerring art of Mr. Herne saved him from the accusation of intense, glaring melodrama. He understood thoroughly the balance between tension and quietude, and there is no bit of stage writing more natural, more cheerful, and more real than the act which succeeded this violent one in "Shores Acres," *Uncle Nat* preparing the Christmas stockings. Those who are fortunate enough to recollect the wonderful naturalness of Mr. Herne's acting, will always point to the final curtain of this play, where *Uncle Nat*, left alone on the stage, by the very flexibility of his facial expression, depicted the full beauty of his character, as he closed up the room for the night, put out the lamps, and, lighted only by the glow from the fire in the stove, slowly left the room as the cuckoo clock struck twelve. Such work, of which Mr. Herne as an actor was capable, is



to a certain extent the realization of Maeterlinck's idea of the *static* drama.

After seeing "Shore Acres" in 1893, Henry George wrote:

"I cannot too much congratulate you upon your success. You have done what you have sought to do — made a play pure and noble that people will come to hear. You have taken the strength of realism and added to it the strength that comes from the wider truth that realism fails to see; and in the simple portrayal of homely life, touched a *universal* chord. . . . Who, save you, can bring out the character you have created — a character which to others, as to me, must have recalled the tender memory of some sweet saint of God."

Having made a comfortable fortune with the success of "Hearts of Oak," Mr. Herne's progress, up to the time of "Shore Acres," was marked by persistent opposition and lack of financial success. This initial play of his, which, when first produced at the Baldwin Theatre on September 9, 1879, was known as "Chums," was, in many of its details, based on "The Mariner's Compass," by Henry Leslie. Its main plot was used again in "Sag Harbor;" and despite the fact that it contained many stereotyped romantic speeches, it is well at the outset to note that gift which Mr. Herne possessed — the gift of simplicity, which never deserted him, no matter how old-fashioned and unoriginal some of his scenes might be. There are countless plays and stories dealing with a marriage between a girl and her guardian, which at first is over-clouded by the fact that the girl loves another, but which finally ripens into a full happiness and a satisfactory ending. One cannot quite accept those heroes of fiction or drama, however mature and settled, who would give up their wives because of a conscience.

But these incongruities were more than overbalanced by Mr. Herne's inimitable handling of the commonplace in

life. He was able to breathe into his dialogue those small, playful expressions that lighten up the whole character. At one moment serious, he never allowed himself — except in the case of “Margaret Fleming” — to subject his audiences to unrelieved strain. The papers, in receiving his so-called domestic dramas, showed surprise over the effectiveness of the commonplace. They were not used to the little happenings of home life, to the glorification of those situations which abound in comradeship, and of those quiet scenes with a baby which are successful on the stage only when the actor possesses that great art which alone knows how to deal with quiet detail.

“Hearts of Oak” exhibited the influence of Dickens in its character portrayal. Judged by the standards that we now have in these times of ultra-realism, we might call the sentiment old-fashioned, we might even notice certain speeches which point a moral rather than adorn the tale. No one, however, could ever accuse Mr. Herne of being “preachy,” — he had that exquisite sense of justice and of the fitness of things which, when the time came for him to write “The Rev. Griffith Davenport,” showed itself to a high degree, inasmuch as, dealing with a circuit rider of the South and likewise with the problem of slavery, he could have fallen into the error of the average dramatist who, handling the same subject, has generally falsified the truth in attempting to thrust forward personal theories. “Drifting Apart” is regarded as one of the most powerful temperance sermons ever put on the stage, unless we except the successful melodrama, “Drink.” Yet there is little of distinction in the actual script of the piece, save the suggested possibilities in the acting that were so marked on its first presentation at the People’s Theatre in New York, on May 7, 1888. Mrs. Herne assumed the rôle of *Mary Miller*, and infused it with a subtle interpretation of art for truth’s sake, a character-

istic most distinctive in her work. Mr. Garland spoke of it in these terms: "It was so utterly opposed to the tragedy of the legitimate. Here was tragedy that appalled and fascinated like the great fact of living. . . . The fourth act was like one of Millet's paintings."

And here it is well to note a wonderful point marking Mr. Herne's activity. His lines of life were so cast that he was denied the advantages of the student, although he possessed the mind of the scholar. Without any apparent effort on his part, he absorbed the best literature, and it was an easy matter for him to reach the heart of any subject which attracted his attention. Although he set himself down to write a melodrama when he began "The Minute Men," and although, because of this very self-consciousness on his part, he failed in his attempt, he was nevertheless successful in attaining a certain atmosphere of historical reality, akin to the true Revolutionary spirit. This was more solidly and more artistically accomplished in "The Rev. Griffith Davenport,"<sup>1</sup> which is one of Mr. Herne's best contributions to dramatic literature, however much we might be inclined to claim that "Sag Harbor" contains his most finished writing. Of all Civil War dramas it is assuredly the finest example of a balance of truth, artistic situation, and equal justice to both sides, which is lacking in "Shenandoah" and "The Heart of Maryland." The point of view is one which might be said to be as much Southern as Northern. The principle of slavery was antagonistic to Mr. Herne's social philosophy; and should the bias be found at all in this play, it would lie in his interpretation of *duty* as confronting Griffith Davenport. For the Southerner was fighting as much to sustain State rights as to protect his slave property; historical fact will show that at the beginning of the war, slavery as an institution was

<sup>1</sup> Based on Helen H. Gardner's novel, "The Unofficial Patriot."

decreasing through an economic, evolutionary change. Davenport's struggle was not so much that of a Southerner who was torn between his duty to State and his duty to country, as it was the conception of Mr. Herne, whose idea of duty was wholly from the standpoint of country, and not from that of State. The atmosphere of the drama is very successfully obtained through the handling of the simple details of Southern life. Perhaps there was an over-accentuation of the darky characteristics, but they were not the customary antics of the stage minstrel or of the conventional Southern drama. As a playwright, Mr. Herne infused into his darkies that same strain of humanity which he is said to have put into a negro character-part he once played with such determined and realistic villainy.

It is significant to obtain Mr. Herne's own estimate of his different plays. We find him analyzing the cause for this success and for that failure; we hear him making a confession that although "Hearts of Oak," in its dealing with Marblehead folk, was a new departure, since it had neither hero nor villain, it was crude in construction. With a simple *naïveté*, he recognized in "The Minute Men," with its Paul Revere's ride and its Battle of Lexington, a step nearer the truth; while in its character of *Dorothy Foxglove* it afforded a "glorious" rôle for Mrs. Herne. He was frank enough to confess that in "Drifting Apart," his story of Gloucester fishermen, based on "Mary, the Fisher's Child," there was displayed a weak comedy element in the introduction of the stage soubrette and the funny man. Even in "Margaret Fleming," he evidently felt that there were didactic spots in the dialogue. So that by this self-criticism of the artist, we are able, to a certain extent, to catch glimpses of the whole-souled sincerity of the man, who sought truth externally, simply because he saw clearly its spirit. As he has written: "Art is a personal expression of life. The finer the form and color

and the larger the truth, the higher the art. . . . Art is universal; it can be claimed by no man, creed, race, or time, and all art is good."

The change that came over Mr. Herne after having produced "Drifting Apart" was coincident with an intellectual and spiritual change affecting both himself and his wife. As I have said, they were mentally receptive of new ideas. They were following, in Huxley, in Spencer, in Howells, in Tolstoi, those tendencies, which, attracting one to higher conceptions of ethical duty and of social justice, brought one's view-point nearer to the common life. Mrs. Herne was always mentally keen. Hamlin Garland writes of her: "To see her radiant with intellectual enthusiasm, one has but to start a discussion of the nebular hypothesis, or to touch upon the atomic theory, or doubt the inconceivability of matter. She is perfectly oblivious to space and time if she can get some one to discuss Flammarion's supersensuous world of force, Mr. George's theory of land-holding, or Spencer's law of progress."

The next artistic effort that Mr. Herne put his hand to was by no means fraught with elements of popularity. It was truth laid bare, with no gloss of romanticism about it, however much it might be saturated with feeling; souls stark naked in their sin, and in their vigorous dealing with sin. One marvels, after having read "Margaret Fleming," what there is of tangible literary value in such a story, for one undoubtedly feels its value. It proves nothing, it has no direct intent; it is a segment of life painted with no idea of gaining art effects, but showing how very close to life one's vision may be. The realism is almost pitiless in its consequences; it is almost photographic in its detail. It is the commonplace story of the man who goes wrong, and whose illegitimate child is nurtured by his wife after she has discovered his transgressions. It is the close tragedy of a

woman's struggle to estimate at its full worth the animal instinct in man.

For the student of American drama, Mr. Herne's activity as a writer falls easily into two classes. We may narrow our consideration down, so as to include "Margaret Fleming" and "The Rev. Griffith Davenport" on the one hand, with "Shore Acres" and "Sag Harbor" on the other; the former representing his realism, and the latter representing — if we must designate him by a term — his rural characteristics which were more vital than those of Denman Thompson, as seen in "The Old Homestead."<sup>1</sup> When "Margaret Fleming" was ready for presentation, the dramatist found himself in a peculiar position, for no manager dared risk capital on a piece so freed from what the public was usually accustomed to, and so devoid of a happy ending. Likewise, there were certain situations which appeared to shock the conventional taste. It was at this time that Hamlin Garland began to take that interest in the Herne family which rapidly ripened into the deepest friendship. He and Mr. Howells seemed to recognize the rare originality which lay in the simple style of Mr. Herne's work. Even in "Drifting Apart," melodramatic though it was, there were certain direct, incisive, and simple passages of writing that partook of the very highest and best qualities in realism.

So that, naturally, "Margaret Fleming"<sup>2</sup> perforce appealed to these two literary men, who became so far interested as not only to suggest the idea, but to further the scheme of leasing Chickering Hall in Boston, and of presenting the play to an intellectual assemblage which, unfortunately, is

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Thompson (1833-1911) was not prolific. "The Old Homestead" was originally called "Joshua Whitcomb."

<sup>2</sup> "Shore Acres" was really being evolved by Mr. Herne before the writing of "Margaret Fleming." The play was dedicated to his children, Julie, Chrystal, and Dorothy.

difficult to gather together for a theatre performance. The piece ran for several weeks, but it was a financial failure, although the press recognized a certain subtle force, a certain plain and vital power which were rarely seen upon the stage. This was in the year 1890, when Ibsen was practically unknown to the American theatre-going public, when the slightest deviation from the accepted conventions of morality was regarded as *boldness*. It was this attitude of mind more than anything which the play itself contained, that involved it in such disastrous consequences. When the piece was revived at the Art Theatre in Chicago, during 1907, with Miss Chrystal Herne in the title *rôle* and with Mrs. Herne as stage manager, all of the critics recognized its forcefulness and its serious simplicity, deploring the fact that it had remained in obscurity for so long a time, when in every respect one was justified in regarding it as a high specimen of American dramatic art.

Mr. Herne's next piece, "The Rev. Griffith Davenport,"<sup>1</sup> met with the same cold reception, and it is natural to find him becoming somewhat discouraged as to the possibilities of carrying the American public with him along the lines which meant most to him, and which he was best fitted to follow. So he determined thereafter to add popular qualities to his stark realism. Not for a moment could he have discarded his innate ability to deal with simple things; but he drew upon the stock subterfuges of the old school, at times becoming a little over-sentimental, whereas one of the beauties of "Margaret Fleming" was the depth of its tragic sentiment.

The interstices between the completion of his several pieces were filled up by Mr. Herne's acting, and likewise by his excellent stage management, which was always in demand for large productions. There are some who believe

<sup>1</sup> It was begun in the summer of 1894, and not produced until 1899.

that as a stage manager Mr. Herne's influence upon the present is more marked than as a dramatist. Through kindly guidance and illuminating interpretation, he impressed his methods upon all of the actors who were under his care; and many on the stage to-day regard Mr. Herne as the one force which meant most to them in their careers. But in the future, Mr. Herne's position will be dependent entirely upon his value as a dramatist.

There are a few facts, leading up to the close of Mr. Herne's life, which have to be regarded. After going to Boston, around 1890, he lived in a modest little home at Ashmont, in the suburbs. The failure of "Margaret Fleming" was coincident with a rather unsettled period in the history of literary Boston, a period which — to use Mr. Garland's expression — was marked by a discovery of the fact that to meet success every one had to go to New York. So that about the same time he, Mr. Howells, and Mr. Herne all went to that city. It was not until 1894 that Mr. Herne moved with his family to his estate in Southampton, Long Island, where the dramatist did much of his final writing, and where he was able to satisfy his love of the sea and his thorough enjoyment of home life. At this time one would be sure to note his fondness for the fields and his enthusiasm for tennis and bicycling. Simple of heart and boyish in action, there was nothing so important that he would not spare the time to mend a broken doll for his daughter Dorothy. Here also he was drawn more and more into interests other than those dealing with drama. His reading became broader, his political opinions became pronounced, in fact so pronounced as to demand his time for public speaking in the interests of Henry George. So ardent was he in his acceptance of the doctrine of free access to the soil, that his theatrical manager at one time advised him to be more careful, inasmuch as his theatre audiences might resent his



political views. But Mr. Herne was not a man to fear consequences. To the day of his death, June 2, 1901, he was an ardent supporter of Bryan.

It is hard to separate a consideration of Mr. Herne the dramatist, from an estimate of Mr. Herne the man. His plays contain unmistakable signs of that wonderful kindness of spirit which was so marked in his daily association with people. He was a man who, in exterior, might be considered blunt; but Nature often endows a person gifted with a love for the human with a certain protection against a too ready acceptance of everyone. And so that guest was fortunate who succeeded in breaking through the reserve, behind which lay the true James A. Herne, inveterate joker, good comrade, and active thinker. In him there was an inexhaustible fund of joy and, as one critic said, he was always intellectually young. This was strikingly evident in his association with his own children, the family comprising three daughters and one son: Julie Herne, who has already very creditably illustrated her inherited gift of playwriting in "Richter's Wife" — given a hearing several years ago; Chrystal Herne, who has done some distinctive acting; and Dorothy Herne who was on the stage for several years, appearing in "Shore Acres." The three have all appeared severally and together in the juvenile *rôles* of their father's plays. The son, Jack, is already exhibiting in his school career certain characteristics of his father. The household to-day is permeated with those kindly memories which bespeak more than anything else the full force of Mr. Herne's influence. A mixture of Irish keenness of humor with vigor of ideas marks the daily life of the Herne family, and during the dramatist's lifetime it was just this distinctive vein which was found in the general atmosphere around him.

There are some men born to see clearly, to be zealous after the vital principles of life, the constant truths of the

ages,— the interchange of thoughts and ideas which elevate in the effort to live our highest and best. These are the thoughts which were usually upon the lips of Mr. Herne. He was a man of the present, drawing from the moment what was truest from his standpoint. He loved the theatre, but he was always careful, even in the midst of his stage directions, to call attention to those realistic bits of acting which one identifies with life rather than with the simulation of life.

He took his art seriously;<sup>1</sup> he recognized in it a social force and a civilizing factor. He believed that truth in art was as much within the grasp of the stage as of the pulpit, that the theatre was as much to be upheld in the light of a temple for the work of the dramatist, as a museum was to be considered a civilizing factor in its capacity as temple for the art of the painter. The theatre to him was a place for the upholding of good. He once said: "We must not condemn an art or an institution because a corrupt civilization has affected it." He further said that "the province of the theatre is not to preach objectively, but to teach subjectively." He recognized that an art was vicious only because of the existence of lovers of vicious art. He was broad in his ideas; his voice was always heard in the cause of liberty — whether political or artistic. He was to a certain extent an individualist, recognizing that the Kingdom of God is within us; yet according to his own words: "No individual can emancipate the race; he cannot even emancipate his own calling. The race must be taught to emancipate itself."

We do not find Mr. Herne afraid to state his own position, to formulate his own belief. What was he spiritually but a firm upholder of the force of deed, over and above creed? As though it were his own declaration of faith, he wrote:

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Herne was one of the first actors to make a stand against the binding influence of the Theatrical Syndicate.

"I believe that every human being has a certain amount of divinity—that is, of God—within him; just as much of God as he is capable of holding. And he gives out just as much of that divinity as he is capable of expressing. And I believe that if he were not bound down by unjust social laws, that if he were free, the divinity would grow and develop and propagate its specie. In other words, I believe that when we free men, when we free labor, we will free art, we will free the Church, and elevate the theatre, and not until then."

This conviction, this recognition of the spiritual in the material, this connection of the facts of life with the unknown forces in the world, were not confined to theoretical discussions. Mr. Herne's political convictions were likewise founded upon convictions within himself. During the Henry George campaign, when he took the stump in the cause of single tax, we find him connecting art with the civic life of the people, we find him realizing, as only a man can who recognizes that art is an expression of life, that the producers and the non-producers of the world may be regarded from the standpoint of dealing in spirit as well as of dealing in wheat and hemp and tobacco. Art, whether it be the shaping of a statue, the writing of a sonnet, or the growing of a prize ear of corn, has a common point of contact. And so again we hear him saying: "The pen, the easel, the chisel, the harp, the sock and buskin, are in reality tools of labor; and the men who wield them are laborers, and their interests are swayed by the welfare and prosperity of those who till the soil, shear the sheep, and weave the cloth."

There are two characteristic notes throughout Mr. Herne's plays, which stand as a fair indication of the man. We find his love of the beautiful in the sense that truth alone is beautiful; and that he approved of Enneking's belief that "the ideal is the choicest expression of the real," is sufficient measure of his high moral outlook upon life. We

note his realization of the human qualities which underlie all nature; and it may be further added that he had that pride of race, that instinct of the parental which were so well exhibited in "Margaret Fleming," and in such comments as these: "Maternity I consider the noblest theme of human kind; and I have no patience with that false prudery which would keep from young people truths they ought to know about in their purest and holiest sense."

Mr. Herne is little known, outside of a limited number of people in this country. Now that he is dead, it is hard to secure actors who can fill *rôles* that he usually assumed with such fulness of interpretation. William Archer has from time to time called the English public's attention to the plays of America's most distinctive dramatist. But unfortunately, the English public has only seen the rural pieces, slightly amended to accord with English understanding. Even we in America have not been fully awakened to what Mr. Herne means in the general dramatic and literary development. He was a writer of direct and simple prose; his images were not involved, his characters were not obscured by symbolistic motives. In his narrative, in his descriptions — when he was at his best, one is reminded of the vigorous prose of Lincoln; a direct speech based not on any effort for effect, but prompted by desire to say something, or to tell something in the clearest manner possible. And in closing, it were well to quote one paragraph from a speech of Mr. Herne's, which stands out above all others because of the fact that it represents the simplicity, the depth, and the whole-souled sincerity of the man. Moreover, it stands as a beautiful bit of prose. The quotation relates to his turning from the writing of "Margaret Fleming" to a consideration of "The Hawthornes" — which later became "Shore Acres":

"Mrs. Herne had gone with two of our daughters to spend

a few weeks of the summer at Lemoyne, on Frenchman's Bay, in Maine, and insisted that I should come there and work on the play, and get the benefit of true color and Maine atmosphere; and I went. What an exalted idea of God one gets, down in that old Pine State. One must recognize the sublimity which constantly manifests itself there. It is worth something to live for two whole months on Frenchman's Bay, that beautiful inconstant bay, one minute white with rage, the next all smiles and gently lapping the foothills of old Mount Desert; with the purple mist on the Blue Hills in the distance on the one hand, the Schoodic range on the other; the perfume of the pine trees in every breath you inhale, the roar of the ocean eight miles away, and the bluest of blue skies overarching all. In such a spot as that a man must realize, if he has never realized it before, that he and this planet are one, and part of the universal whole."

## NOTE

None of Mr. Herne's plays have been published. The only copies extant of "Margaret Fleming" and "The Rev. Griffith Davenport" were burned in a fire that totally destroyed "Herne Oaks," Dec. 11, 1909. The following references will be of use to the student:

"Mr. and Mrs. Herne." Hamlin Garland. *Arena*, October, 1891, pp. 543-60.

"Old Stock Days in the Theatre." James A. Herne. *Arena*, 6:401, September, 1892.

"On a Barn Roof." Julie Adrienne Herne. *Arena*, December, 1893, pp. 131-33.

"Mask or Mirror." B. O. Flower. *Arena*, 8:304, 1893.

"Truth for Truth's Sake in Drama." James A. Herne. *Arena*, 17:361-70, Feb., 1897. [This was used as a lecture before the Home Congress at Cotillion Hall, Boston, Oct. 27, 1896. On Jan. 31, 1897, Mr. Herne appeared in the pulpit of the First Congregational Church, Kansas City, and delivered a lecture on "The Theatre as It Is."]

"James A. Herne: Actor, Dramatist, and Man." An appreciation by Hamlin Garland, J. J. Enneking, and B. O. Flower. *Arena*, 26:282-92, September, 1901.

- "James A. Herne in Griffith Davenport." Marco Tiempo. *Arena*, 22:375, Sept. 1899.
- "Rev. Griffith Davenport." J. Corbin, *Harp. Wk.*, 43:139, 213; John D. Barry, *Lit. W.*, Bost., 30:57; Howells, *Literature*, 4: 265-66.
- "Margaret Fleming." Howells. *Harp. Mag.*, Editor's Study, 83: 478, August, 1891.
- "Herne and his New Play, 'Sag Harbor'." F. Wayne. *Nat'l Mag.*, Bost., 11:393.
- "The American Stage." Third Article. William Archer. *Pall Mall Magazine*, 20:23-37.
- "Players of the Present." John Bouvé Clapp and Edwin Francis Edgett. Dunlap Soc., pt. 1, 1899, p. 148.
- "The Stage in America." Norman Hapgood. Macmillan. Chap. III, "Our Two Ablest Dramatists."
- "Famous Actors of To-day in America." Lewis C. Strang. Page, 1900. Chap. II, "James A. Herne."

## CHAPTER VII

### DAVID BELASCO AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SWITCHBOARD

THE story is told of an artist who, in the cramped quarters of his room, was wont to do the most exquisite pictures, marked by finesse and delicacy; but no sooner had he accumulated enough to afford a larger studio than the deftness of his art deserted him. It is one of the unexplainable points about all professions that there is a limit to expression; that there is a line where effect has its greatest scope, beyond which the appeal goes to waste. The story points a dramatic moral. For Dion Boucicault, in the course of his vast experience as playwright, actor and manager, discovered that beyond a certain number, it was difficult to fuse the minds of an audience; to grip their attention and to hold it.

Such is the snag against which the stockholders of the New Theatre in New York first struck. They wished to build an art playhouse of certain proportions, with a stage far exceeding in amplitude the proscenium width of any ordinary theatre, and suitable for light opera, spectacular and drawing-room drama. This is well-nigh impossible; for, to illustrate the point in exaggeration, it would be artistic suicide to spread the boxed-in delicacy of Pinero's "Trelawny of the 'Wells'" over an area of the Hippodrome stage.

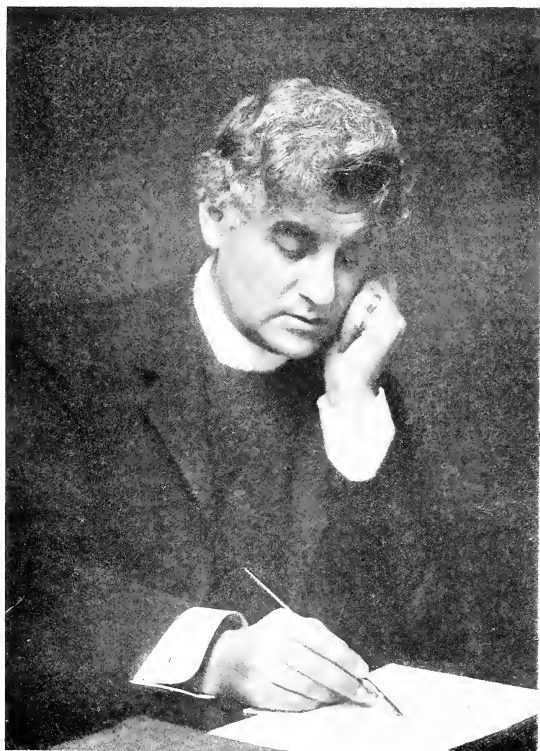
And so, the art of the drama is the art of all arts, where proportion, perspective and color accumulate for a given effect. No one has studied this fact to greater purpose than

David Belasco, in whom the instinct of the painter before his canvas is the dominant characteristic, — an instinct which must assuredly prompt the mechanism of any art theatre we may ever hope to have. When the story of scenic realism is told, he will occupy a distinctive position. Such a survey will narrate how Mrs. John Drew, once playing in "London Assurance," created a sensation by having a real carpet and mirror among the properties for one act. Not only in this, but in all of Boucicault's productions, some marvel of stage mechanism indicated to what extent the scenic art could be carried; and David Belasco has continued the tradition.

In our invariable effort to estimate a man, even though what he next does may upset our theories, there are two phases to be considered, one of which includes the other. Our view depends primarily on what he has done; it is tempered by the direct influence which has been brought to bear upon him by others. No matter what claims to originality an artist may have, no matter how strong the impress of his personality, those subtle workings of environment and of unconscious imitation are perforce obliged to develop within the man a certain inclination, a certain leaning, which will shape his angle of vision. To say that Mr. Belasco was for a time private secretary to Boucicault; to understand that he acknowledges the influence upon him of such pieces as "The Robbers," "Pizarro," and "Fazio"; to follow the status of the theater when he first reached New York in 1882 — a status measured by the success of such French melodramas as "The Two Orphans," "The Celebrated Case," and "Rose Michel" — these factors will, if examined *in extenso*, explain something about Mr. Belasco's impetus as a playwright.

The man behind his ascetic dress is a combination of conflicting elements. It is easy to say this of anyone; but in the case of Mr. Belasco, facts and conditions make it evident.





*Photo. by The Misses Selby*

DAVID BELASCO



His manner betrays the artistic temperament; his steady look has two qualities, one which explains how he reaches the estimate of an actor's limitations, and the other in what manner he has withstood the enmity of the Theatrical Trust. It is not always essential for a dramatist to penetrate deeply into life, but one cannot deny that Mr. Belasco's glance has taken the details in thoroughly. He has had the experience which should come to all writers of plays; he has been thrown against the strong contrasts of living which are usually to be found in a mining camp; he has lurked in the highways and byways of existence, unconsciously gathering those elemental stuffs which are the essential ingredients in all passion. These he has in most cases toned down, but the brutal elements in "Du Barry" and in "Adrea" indicate to what uses experience of this kind is brought.

There is the ascetic streak in David Belasco, colored by a pronounced spiritual and contrasting sentimental *verve*; there is the tinge of morbidity which is always attendant upon a clinical analysis of psychological phenomena. None but Mr. Belasco himself can realize the satisfaction he gained many years ago through watching the heart of a woman as it lay upon a plate before him. Yet such was the actual occurrence, all the while his imagination playing havoc with the physical object. In like manner has the manager studied the effects of poisons upon the body, reasoning out the physical contortions as they differed under varying conditions. This preparation for the drama is not essential to all playwrights; it suited Mr. Belasco's temperament that he seek impressions in this manner.

Yet side by side with this curiosity that digs into the physical causes and effects, there is the other phase characteristic of the ascetic nature — the love of solitude. For five years, during the formative period of his life, Mr. Belasco was under the guidance of the priesthood at Vancouver.

The eight-year-old boy was impressionable, and Father McGuire, if he could not educate his tastes away from the stage, at least set a mark of ecclesiasticism upon his dress, to which he has always adhered. In contrast with the little fellow, asleep in his cheerless cell of the monastery, may be set the picture of the nervous playwright as he is to-day, closeted in his secret studio with his books and curios, totally alone in a roaring city, since none know where that workshop may be, except a few of his essential staff.

Here it is that he plans in secret, the slightest suggestions bringing meaning to him; he is a lover of the twilight; in the thunder and the lightning are hidden possible electrical impressions. His is the quick grasp of the picturesque, the striking, the impressionable. In every respect does he practice the technique of the painter before his canvas.

Mr. Belasco is the second present-day dramatist of note to draw upon Iberian traits, for his family, like the Pineros, were of ancient Portuguese extraction, and were forced to flee to England before the wrath of the Moors. But, while the Pineros remained as British subjects, the Belascos of David's immediate stock proceeded still further to Victoria (in Vancouver), where the father of the present playwright became rich and was elected Mayor, then became poor again and made another move to San Francisco, drawn there by optimistic accounts which marked the gold fever of 1849.<sup>1</sup>

In that city it was that the present holder of the name was born on July 25, 1859. There is little to record of these early days. It must have been before his departure to Vancouver with Father McGuire that he assumed juvenile *rôles* in "Pizarro" with Charles Kean; in "Metamora" with Edwin Forrest; in "East Lynne" with Julia Dean. Before then, also, he received some slight school training, as well as

<sup>1</sup> In crossing the Isthmus of Panama, his mother gained distinction as the first woman traveler to do so.

gained some reputation as a reciter of a piece called "The Madman."

When he returned from his priest friends, he was thirteen and not yet quite through his education, for he was placed at Lincoln College, from which he was graduated in 1875. When he was scarcely fourteen, he could boast authorship of "Jim Black; or, The Regulator's Revenge." All through these years forces in him and around him were pointing toward the stage. It does not take much to fan a liking into a passion, and it is recorded how, having once gone to see "Hamlet," the boy had rushed home to the garret and there played through the drama, even essaying, at this early age, to rewrite the dialogue from memory!

Then followed the months of a struggling actor. He began by supporting Mary Welles in "The Lion of Nubia," and soon, throwing his whole future into the dramatic scales, Mr. Belasco experienced the vicissitudes of the exhibitor of Egyptian mysteries, of the melodramatic "super," even for a while playing *Hamlet* and *Richard III* himself in the mountain towns and backwoods settlements of the West. He was fortunate, during this period, in being brought into direct contact with the golden era of American acting. Edwin Booth, John McCullough, E. A. Sothern, William Florence, Edwin Adams and Adelaide Nielson were the stars in the San Francisco of those days. He even joined Sothern's "Dundreary" company, appearing as the valet.

Thereafter began the training of David Belasco as assistant stage manager of a theatre in Virginia City, where the stock company was prepared for any emergency, from farce to tragedy, and where Belasco was supposed, much as Ibsen had been expected at Bergen, to fit dramas for production. He did more than this, since he was required to act as well as to manage. While serving in this capacity, Dion Boucicault and his company arrived to fill an engagement. The Irish

wizard, in the writing of plays, could juggle with three plots at a time; he had, with Laura Keene, produced a play within an abnormally short period by rehearsing one act while in the midst of writing another. He was alert to activity of all kinds, and he found energy to his liking in the assistant stage manager.

When he left Virginia City, Boucicault carried Belasco with him as private secretary, and to his young associate "Led Astray" was dictated, besides the scenes for many other productions. It is not likely that the effectiveness which marked the Boucicault drama would escape the future wizard of American stage-craft. "Arrah-na-Pogue," when it reached San Francisco, became the one strong outside influence to affect the theatrical conditions on the Pacific slope. The secretary might have gone to New York soon after had his mother not intervened; and it was just as well, since the experience which he was now to gain as manager and stock dramatist of the Baldwin Theatre matured his managerial powers and at the same time brought him into association with James A. Herne, who, for a while, was at the same theatre. The play-goer of the present generation needs must weigh the value of such repertoires as old-time actors used to carry — dramas that called for the varying shades of classic comedies, and the historical scope of different styled tragedies. But though there was a conventional way of regulating all stock companies, Belasco, even at that early date, began to introduce original methods, and Charles Thorne, Frank Mayo and Edwin Adams — all men of longer experience — soon came to regard his advice as authoritative.

Belasco was the youngest manager along the Pacific slope. The theatre was run on a somewhat crude, though very artistic, scale. Audiences of all classes had to be catered to, and a motley, picturesque crowd gathered together on



*Photo. by Sarony*

A. M. PALMER





Saturdays — the melodrama evenings — to thrill over "The Idiot of the Mountains" and "The Robber of the Pyrenees." Thus the years passed at the Baldwin Theatre, the Grand Opera House and the Metropolitan. When finally Belasco decided, in 1882, to go to New York, his confidence in himself was backed by an enviable experience. No schooling is better for a playwright than just this intimate contact which Mr. Belasco had had with the hundreds of plays that came under his supervision. Already his hand had been turned to dramatizations, adaptations and even original work.

But when the Mallorys engaged him as stage director and stock dramatist of the Madison Square Theatre, they probably placed more store by his general usefulness as a producer, as a manipulator of other people's crude material, than as an author of any formidable proportions.

New York was then going through its final decade of old-time managerial policies; the Theatrical Trust was still to come; the American playwright, in the face of foreign importations, was finding it difficult to gain recognition; Mr. Howard was battling hard and receiving rough handling by the critics for his "Saratoga." A. M. Palmer was meeting success with French melodramas; Wallack, atune to English melodrama, was soon listening to Belasco's tempting offer of "La Belle Russe"; Daly, at the most disastrous period of his career, was tottering through an opera craze. The latter manager had begun with marked success; such pieces as "Under the Gas Light," "Article 47" (for Clara Morris) and "Pique" (for Fanny Davenport) had obtained instant favor. He had been drawing from France, when he adapted "Frou-Frou" for Agnes Ethel, and he had turned to the German of Mosenthal for "Leah, the Forsaken." It was after this that he found a mine in the German farce.

In the midst of all this conglomerate emotional material,

Mr. Belasco found the Madison Square Theatre devoted to the quiet domestic play, so quiet that it had drawn down upon it the derisive title of "milk and water" drama. Naturally the distorted methods of acting would not suit this style of play. Those were the days of over-emphasis, big periods, measured intervals, and rounded gesture. Mr. Belasco proceeded to sacrifice all of this bombast, much to the surprise and doubt of his co-workers. The comedian no longer was allowed to wait for a laugh; it had either to come through the pure unctiousness of the character-acting, or not at all. Such a *régime* as the young manager instituted soon won the confidence of everyone.

The little playhouse on Twenty-fourth Street was in the hey-day of its existence; A. M. Palmer soon became interested in its success; the stock company which bore its name was winning public favor; a school of acting was to involve the labors of Henry C. De Mille and Boucicault, who turned to it, broken in health and sorely disturbed in mind. Mr. De Mille was play-reader for the theatre, which meant, for example, that in three months he examined two hundred manuscripts submitted by would-be American playwrights!

When, however, a drama was accepted, it was soon turned over to Mr. Belasco for final shaping. This is what happened to Mr. Howard's "The Young Mrs. Winthrop"; suggested changes were made on all sides, and the final re-casting was accomplished with Belasco's assistance. The result was that by the production Mr. Howard gained warm commendation from the press, and Mr. Belasco immediately found himself in possession of considerable prestige.

What followed, up to the time that the latter joined forces with Daniel Frohman at the Lyceum, in 1885,<sup>1</sup> constitutes the history of the New York theatre rather than the develop-

<sup>1</sup> See "Memories of a Manager." Daniel Frohman. 1911.

ment of the American dramatist. It is only necessary to say that under such conditions, and together with Mr. Belasco's temperament, there grew into dominant proportions a managerial grasp, an analytical keenness for large effect, a marvelous readiness to assimilate according to his needs, an instinctive and unerring eye for the romantic.

Up to this time little of his actual stage writing had brought him any unusual distinction. Between his arrival in the East and his collaborating with De Mille, "*La Belle Russe*" (Wallack's, 1882), "*The Stranglers of Paris*" (1883), "*Hearts of Oak*" (with Mr. Herne) (1884)†,<sup>1</sup> and "*May Blossom*" (1884)<sup>2</sup> had met with success. But there were also to his credit titles which are not even familiar in name to the present generation of theatre-goers. In this category are included "*Valerie*," "*Miss Helyett*," "*Pawn Ticket 210*,"† "*The Moonlight Marriage*," "*The Doll Master*," "*A Christmas Night*," "*Within an Inch of His Life*," "*The Lone Pine*," "*American Born*," "*Not Guilty*," "*The Haunted House*," "*Cherry and Fair Star*," "*Sylvia's Loves*," "*Paul Arniff*," "*The Curse of Cain*," "*The Millionaire's Daughter*," "*The Ace of Spades*" and "*The Roll of the Drum*." One is not far wrong in inferring that, however effective these may have been, there was more melodramatic situation in them than definite intent, nor did they have sufficient distinctiveness in themselves to survive the immediate atmosphere and demand which encouraged them. Had it not been that Mr. Belasco's art instinct as a constructive manager was uppermost at the time, he might have been contributing at this moment to the broad melodrama which thrives on the morbid, however it may seek to glorify virtue. But so

<sup>1</sup> Plays marked thus (†) indicate collaboration.

<sup>2</sup> This is the only one of Mr. Belasco's plays that has so far been published. It is included in the French series. "*The Grand Army Man*" has been "novelized" by Harvey J. O'Higgins.

characteristic did this art side become, that one cannot separate the manager from the author.

By the deftness of stage manipulation which had made him so sought after that the Mallorys on occasions were forced to lend him to others, public attention was now centred upon the Lycéum. The association of Mr. De Mille with Mr. Belasco resulted in four plays, all marked with certain conventions that characterize Mr. Howard at his best — stock situations that balance three sets of opposite characters: the ingénue *rôles*, the romantic hero and heroine, and the middle-aged couple upon whom comedy, bordering nigh on to farce, is unerringly practiced. We see this in "The Charity Ball" (1889), as well as in "Men and Women" (1890). Then there was "The Wife," a drama which in 1887 was brought into the courts, where an unsuccessful suit was tried, with Frances Aymar Mathews as the plaintiff. But the greatest coup which the two made together was the preparation of a *rôle* in "Lord Chumley" (1888), for E. H. Sothorn, which marked the son with some of the excellent comedy capabilities belonging to his father, whose "Lord Dundreary" was undoubtedly the source of inspiration. It must be said that the collaborators succeeded in developing a certain human sympathy for the fop which was not unlike the loveableness so pronounced in the earlier *rôle*.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1890 and 1895, which last date marks the inception of the Theatrical Syndicate, perhaps one might say until after "Zaza" (1899) and "Naughty Anthony" (1900), which ended his association with any members of the organized managerial system, Mr. Belasco must be regarded only as a successful stage manager and a skilful playwright and adapter. "The Girl I Left Behind Me" (1893), written

<sup>1</sup> In 1889, Mr. Belasco and Mr. Franklin Sargent produced the "Electra" of Sophocles; while on the Pacific Coast Mr. Belasco mounted a version of the Passion Play.

in conjunction with Franklyn Fyles, was one of the initial successes of the Empire Theatre; "The Heart of Maryland" (1895) was one of the first of his dramas stamped by a large piece of stage technique, such as the swinging bell, with the heroine holding to the clapper; "Zaza" (1899)<sup>1</sup> indicates the deftness with which his translation quite eclipsed the real author of the French original, and his training of Mrs. Carter in the title *rôle* exemplifies the wonderful illuminative power with which he can, in his instruction, carry an actress to the heart of a character and bring out, as a photographer does on a negative, those fine lines which are never evident in the first moments. From this time on, however, his progress has been marked by two dominant notes; he has fought against odds, and has, by his attitude, brought public attention to bear upon both sides of the Trust problem; he has, likewise, incited public curiosity through the lavishness of his stagecraft, so thoroughly taking hold of popular appeal as well-nigh to hypnotize by what is peculiarly, yet legitimately, termed "the Belasco atmosphere."

There are always two sides to a given question, and it is never wise to discuss one without laying as much emphasis upon the other. Suffice it to say at the present moment, whatever move Mr. Belasco has made against the Trust has been planned quite as much in the cause of independent art as to further his personal interests. He has never once gainsaid the advantage of systematizing theatrical finance so as to bring the money question down to a thorough banking basis; but he *has* questioned the ethical side of the booking problem. This places in control of a few hands the portioning of time engagements along theatrical circuits

<sup>1</sup> Other plays during this time were "The Senator's Wife" (1892), and "The Younger Son" (1893).

and involves the playhouses stretched, chain-like, across the continent.

It is a matter of stage history how certain actors made bold to stand against the dictatorship of the Trust, and how, one by one, they succumbed.<sup>1</sup> Not so Mr. Belasco, and because, in his theatre he was determined to practice his own policy, and not be dictated to, he soon realized that along that chain of theatres he was irretrievably debarred; which meant that he must either play in halls or be kept out of certain towns. This necessitated his planning for his own theatres, in New York, in Washington, in Philadelphia, and in Boston. One by one the difficulties constituting his exile are being overcome. But to add to the condition of theatrical monopoly, Mr. Belasco has had, likewise, to face a personal antagonism, which is hardly a matter for theatre discussion, however much it may have been enlarged because of Mr. Belasco's theatre success.

Since the opening of his Belasco playhouse in New York, the manager has presented a long list of remarkable successes from the standpoint of scenic artistry and drawing qualities. He has engaged the efforts of John Luther Long, of Charles Klein, of Richard Walton Tully, and of the Misses Phelps and Short as collaborators; and under his undoubted genius as a painstaking instructor there have come to the fore such names as Mrs. Carter, Miss Bates, Mr. Warfield, Mr. Frank Keenan, Miss Starr, Miss Walker and Miss O'Neil. Furthermore, as material for his success, he has depended upon "Madame Butterfly"† (1900 — Long), "Du Barry" (1900), "The Darling of the Gods"† (1902 — Long), "Sweet Kitty

<sup>1</sup> For a few articles on the Syndicate, see: *International*, 1: 99-122, Jan., 1900, Norman Hapgood; *Fortn. Rev.*, 79:1010-1016, June, 1903, Charles Hawtrey; *Leslie's Monthly*, Oct., 1904, 581-592; Nov., 1904, 31-42; Dec., 1904, 202-210; Jan., 1905, 331-334; *Cosmopolitan*, 38: 193-201, Dec., 1904.

Bellairs" (1903 — dramatization), "Adrea"† (1905 — Long), "The Girl of the Golden West" (1905),<sup>1</sup> "The Rose of the Rancho"† (1906 — Tully), "The Grand Army Man"† (1907 — Phelps — Short). To this list may be added his assistance as manager in the success of "The Auctioneer" and "The Music Master," by Charles Klein, and of "The Warrens of Virginia," by William C. De Mille, the son of his old collaborator.<sup>2</sup>

What are the elements that mark Mr. Belasco, or it would be more in order to say on what special elements does Mr. Belasco place the stamp of his own temperament and genius? I have been fortunate in having before me the stage copies of his important dramas, and I cannot but marvel at the strokes which are made by his unerring eye, unerring in the sense that his strokes seem always to fulfil the special requirement which he at the moment needs. The intricate movement in the first act of "Zaza," the filmy threads of broken dialogue, the minute directions of the dressing-room scene, where, not for a moment, even in the reading, is the imagination left in doubt as to the details of business — here is the painter in his most impressionistic manner, flinging splashes of humanity against a canvas, splashes which draw together the moment they are brought in continuous and active relation one with the other.

"The Darling of the Gods," over-weighty as it is in its mounting, would be difficult to follow in the manuscript, were Mr. Belasco's infinite care of small matters not con-

<sup>1</sup> Made into an opera by Puccini, and sung at the Metropolitan Opera House during the season of 1910-11.

<sup>2</sup> Among Mr. Belasco's recent successes may be mentioned "The Lily" (1910) by himself, and "The Concert," adapted from the German by Leo Ditrichstein. Walter's "The Easiest Way" (1909) created great discussion in New York, but was debarred, by act of the Mayor, from Boston. During the Spring of 1911, he presented William De Mille's "The Woman."

scientifically set down. Even so, the demand this play makes on the imagination, in addition to the amount of imagination it shows in itself, is indication of the visual insight which he and his collaborator have brought to bear.

I do not contend that light plots, and property plots, and calcium plots entitle a man to the distinction of playwright, but the power to conjure up the effective contrasts of high light and shadow is as much to Mr. Belasco's credit as it is to the artist who paints upon a large canvas. The stage settings, sometimes overrich in detail, are nevertheless almost always unflinching in their atmospheric effects. The courtesan, *Du Barry*, is given a setting which balances the savage abandon of her nature with the licentious terrorism of the period. "Adrea," barbaric throughout, does not fail to create a disgust which is too strong to be counteracted by the moment of sacrifice in the end. These are not characteristics which are new to Mr. Belasco; they were evident in him long before, even though they were not fully developed. Some may think that Sardou was the influence behind this, but the young dramatist had written "*La Belle Russe*" before Fanny Davenport began with "*Fedora*" in a list which ended with "*Gismonda*." It was simply the innate genius of the stage manager who may not write for literature, but who, while he remains active, is a constant source of pleasure.

There is nothing so disillusionizing as an empty theatre in daylight; the gaping orchestra chairs show the absence of a responsive crowd; the space from pit to dome, from centre stage to family circle, is like an empty shell waiting for sound and light. But if you possess even the slightest *sense* of the theatre, the scenery with its daub of paint, the switchboard with its banks of levers, the stage hands in their shirtsleeves, will represent the elements of a great art, whose spirit gilds the mechanics of the play.



Take for granted that the scene is naught but a house of cards, that the back-drop on close view is no more nor less than a splash of color, — behind it all is the instinct that creates perspective from the flat. The mechanics of the stage have been brought to such perfection that their misuse instantly reveals the lack of the artist.

The stage is an organism, a whole of many parts; the idea set in dialogue and action must be clothed in speech, light, and scene. This is the supreme work of the stage manager, — to draw these things together in their truest relationship.

One has a right to speak of the psychology of the switch-board, to humanize the mechanics of the theatre. The electrician holds nature in his hands; he has thought out the elements of a prairie sun, and he measures its intensity by the number of switches in use. At rehearsals he has diffused the scene with many moonlights, until the Italian glamour appealed to his feeling. The stage has changed since the time Mary Anderson's *Juliet* faced the headlight of a locomotive, held aloft by a negro boy as the inconstant moon. Psychology is essentially a fluid state, and the progress of electricity has made it possible for stage lighting to be fluid, to be subject to imperceptible shades, to *absorb* the individual rays in a general suffusion.

Not one of our present-day managers has so profited by the response of the electric switchboard to human psychology as Mr. Belasco; in his hands it is the very essence of atmosphere, the very indicator of the scene's tone. Whether it be the enervating blaze of sunlight in the opening act of "The Rose of the Rancho," or the cold gray dawn after the night's anguish in "Madame Butterfly," the result represents no mechanical accident. Once, not so long ago, effect used to be entirely artificial; the villain's entrance was heralded by dark, restless music from a few violins, and by the

roll of a kettledrum. But to-day, Mr. Belasco has driven incidental sentimentality from the orchestra by the dependence upon the switchboard.

What do we mean by the psychology of stage lighting? Simply that every emotional effect of large import results in a corresponding direction being given to the electrician. To take an external example, suppose the stage in semi-darkness; a character enters with a lighted candle. One naturally expects an increase in light, but the intensity must move across the stage with the movement of the candle. It is here that the electrician, from his platform, plays upon his switchboard. By a system of interlocking, and of dimming the flow of current, he can send across the "foots" a flare of lights to follow the candle flame; one bulb is made to glow as the other fades.

Such is the ease of gaining an elementary effect, but the principle is the same, however complicated the requirement. In his studio, Mr. Belasco first imagines his canvas; he then places his "light plots" in the hands of his electrician for fulfilment. At rehearsal he adds to, modifies, rejects, fusing the whole as a painter does with his brush. His stage directions at first become mere skeleton notes of transitory feeling. His assistant stands near, pencil in hand, watching the restless move of the manager, searching among the lights for what he wants. The switchboard is taxed to its uttermost, mixing color to accord with a certain quality of shadow in Mr. Belasco's mind.

If a drama is big, if an actor's art is expressive, a story may often be ably suggested by pantomime; its emotional color, range, and variation in the same way may be sketched in light. Having rehearsed his company beyond the "letter perfect" point, Mr. Belasco assembles them for light effects. His experiments are as much *with* you as *on* you. Not only must the actors harmonize among themselves, but also

with the lights. To their own emotional interpretation of a *rôle*, they must add the atmospheric effect of the stage light. For six minutes the curtain was up before a word was spoken in "The Rose of the Rancho." It was a somnolent scene; those who saw it felt the drowsy vapor of the glow, the still air, and the enervating heat. Let us discount the statement of the press-agent that "so realistic was the scene, it made the stage carpenters drowsy," and be satisfied with the plausible fact that the imagination of the actor caused the switchboard to react upon himself.

Undoubtedly, a stage manager should make his people *feel* the lights; if the scene is cold, the actor should find it easy to shiver within the bleak, steely rays devoid of all warm color. In this way imitation approaches reality; the actor responds by absorbing every element, condition, or circumstance, in order to make his body warm or cold, as the case may be.

Every electrician is in possession of his *cue*, knows the story of the play, and is made to calculate the emotional requirements in terms of his switchboard. He is no machine, no mere feeder of the stage with light. The human tempo of the situation pulses in his veins; he lowers or raises his levers until every blemish is removed. There must be no blotch, no streaks, for the lights should glide; sharp edges should be made to blend.

In that rehearsal for lights, the manager must consider the balance of white surface and shadow. A glint is thrown on a ribbon, a bit of lace, a bare arm or neck; this must be balanced by the absence of light somewhere else. The switchboard must have a tempo regulated to accord with the beat of emotion. Not only that, but the light is guided by the color of a costume, toned to contrast with other dresses possibly; even the hair limits the intensity of light, and if the features of an actor are strong, a strong current upon the

face would only serve to reveal a "war map" of lines. A white light brings disillusionment in its path.

Rehearsal is a matter of constant shifting: a thousand and one directions are given which never find their way on the prompter's script of the play. "I think I'll make that so and so," says the Stage Manager, and the Carpenter looks askance at the Electrician, while the Scene Painter goes back to his pots and brushes, to try again some perspective cliff or shore. "I not only want a moon, but a Japanese moon," cried Mr. Belasco during a rehearsal of "The Darling of the Gods."

In the matter of the switchboard, Mr. Belasco stands in a new light. He is not the conventional stage manager; he is a lover of nature, having felt the close of day on the plains, and seen the first streak of dawn in Italy. He has been an investigator of all phases of the physical as well as of the emotional. He is not merely satisfied with reaching the eye, but he must strike the heart; his lights are always accessories; they are made to reinforce or to counteract; they must serve a purpose, otherwise be discarded. At times he places too much dependence upon such effect; we feel it in the way he "plays up" a brunette or blonde, working his lights to show her to the best advantage. But in the majority of cases, his results are artistic rather than theatrical.

From one of the iron bridges in the flies, flung far above the proscenium arch on the side, the stage presents to view every point of vantage. The five sets of border lights, consisting of two hundred and seventy lamps as an average, the three banks of bulbs in the "foots,"<sup>1</sup> the light strips ready to be placed in any wing, the baby lenses to counteract any false reflection of the "foots" when shadow is thrown on the face at inopportune moments, the large lenses on the bridges, the lamps centred

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Belasco is now experimenting to do away with the "foots."

on particular stage accessories, the stereopticon for cloud effects during a storm or sun or moonlight, — with these the electrician, at the final rehearsal, has “fixed” his diagram, which he has by him for the first few regular performances.

Amber, blue, red, and white are the general colors in use on the stage, besides the direct flow of lime-light. But not always will the standard color do; then the electrician mixes his own stain and dips the incandescent bulb therein. The hard problem for him to consider is not how to reach the proper light out of darkness; it were easy thus to obtain a realistic sun. But the difficult matter is to have the sun come after the appearance of a gray dawn; in other words, to obtain light effects out of light.

The psychology of the switchboard is largely the problem of counteracting shadows, of bringing emotion into high light. That is why the old idea that tragedy must be given the tragic tone is an exploded theory, since contrast, rather than agreement, is the electrician’s asset. Death lurks in the sunlight as well as in the shadow. Was it not in Forbes Robertson’s “Hamlet” that *Ophelia* came broken-minded into an orchard pink with the touch of Spring?

There is not an inch of surface on the stage that cannot be subjected to a flood of light which may be softened or intensified slowly by means of simplicity dimmers, — devices even more responsive than the cock of a gas jet. So important a matter is the switchboard, that a portable one, in no way as extensive as the stationary one, is carried on the road as an important part of the play’s emotional effect.

In “The Rose of the Rancho,” during the course of the first scene, with the sun beating down on the Mission garden, with the *Padre* asleep on his vine-covered porch, the electrician is busy at the switch. Some lenses are focussed for light, others for shadow, amber is thrown upon the gate, straw medium paints the orange tree. A rose bush must

have a special ray upon it, while the arbor, and certain roses, must catch the glint of sunlight. One lens strikes the fountain, centred on the stage, coloring the stone seat upon which *Juanita* flirts with *Kearney*. All the while the baby lens is kept busy spotting the chief actors on the stage.

The significant part of psychology as applied to stage lighting is that in the highest perfection of its handling it is never fixed, particularly in plays dependent upon special atmosphere. If the sunlight strikes the broad front of the Mission steeple at the top, the same intensity hardly suffices to flood the entire building. As the play progresses, the day progresses, and the lights vary; these changes occur in accordance with the electrician's cues. The siesta hour of this first act approaches the eventide, and *Juanita* falls deeper in love with the "Gringo," *Kearney*, as the shadows grow more and more. Thus the "light plot" reads:

"At cue: 'Meet me at my posada,' change lenses Nos. 7, 5, 3 on lower bridge to light amber, also lens on upper bridge R., and lenses on stage R. 3E.; also lens back stage on bridge L., and the four open boxes in 3. Put on 1st border blue to  $\frac{3}{4}$  and 2d, 3d, and 4th borders red to full; take down whites to  $\frac{1}{3}$ ."

This shorthand notation is indicative of mechanical response; levers are handled like the shift-key of a typewriter, banks of lights are interlocked, so as to respond to one force at the same time. Then comes *Kearney's* caressing words: "Let me hold your little brown hand in mine." Many the lovers who have strayed in a garden of roses during the gathering twilight which creeps upon them! But here on the stage there must be a "change of all lenses on bridges and open boxes to red, except the two on bridge left, which go to salmon; take down foots to  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and amber borders to  $\frac{1}{4}$ ; also dim the tubular lamps on window and arbor R."

All the time the scene grows darker; the lamp on the rose

bush is blinded, the fountain is cast in shadow, the belfry is made misty, while the blues begin to mingle with the reds for evening.

Finally, there is uttered *Juanita's* cry of love as *Kearney* leaves her, determined on saving her property from the land-grabbers, looting California. Hence, at cue, "Oh, Gringo, why did you come?"

"Slowly pass amber color over baby lens in 1 R. (This lamp is on *Juanita* at the time; the color is just passed over the lamp and taken off again while the line is spoken.) At same cue, take off both lamps in flies, L. 1 E. This light stands till end of act."

Here one has suggested only a fractional part of the mechanics behind the stage—the psychology of the switchboard, which is only effective when employed with reticence, with reason, with intelligent understanding, with feeling. There is the cartoon use of light as seen in the spotter lime-streak following the clown in the circus; there is the melodramatic use of light, noted in the splotch of green thrown upon the face of Mansfield while he changed from *Jekyll* to *Hyde*. But the artist at the switchboard is a believer in the minor notes as the best notes, and, as regards Mr. Belasco's management, it might be truly claimed, he does not act without reason. He has often said he does not believe in dragging in sound simply for the sake of sound; a wise principle to uphold, even if it is not always followed.

"The Rose of the Rancho" serves our purpose for illustrating the psychology of the switchboard, because its atmosphere involves constantly shifting light; any one of Mr. Belasco's plays largely depends upon accessory of this character, and upon the mechanics demanding constant attention. In the third act of this California romance, we are given a dark stage creeping to full light: reds and blues which succumb to early dawn ambers. The scene is on the

roof, *Kearney* waiting for the day. From the main switch the electrician is working his "dimers" slowly; some clusters of blue — for instance — must take a generous ten minutes to gain full intensity. Here and there on the stage "boards," at places known as pockets, which are merely indicated spots where light plugs may be inserted, a connecting link is to be had between a lamp and the main current. The electrician can only manage the general circuit of "foots" and "borders" and house lights; he has assistants who are drilled by him to work the separate lanterns from the wings and the bridges. Every movement of the persons on that supposed roof is attended by a corresponding balance of incandescence.

The ordinary dress-suit, drawing-room comedy has a fixed light which does not concern itself greatly with the switchboard. But whenever the latter is used, when the light values are supposed to move for the sake of theatrical effects so broad as to hide physiological consistency, then the lack of taste is felt as well as seen. There is certain to be incongruity of color, and also streaks of light, ill-concealed, if concealed at all, by the lanterns which, in the hands of the thinking mechanic, usually absorb and blend when necessary. We once had a production of "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*," more Edison than Shakespeare, more mechanical device than *Puck*, more accessory than art. On the other hand, Forbes Robertson's desert scene in Shaw's "chronicle" play, where *Cæsar* first glimpses *Cleopatra* in the arms of the Sphinx, was made spacious merely through the varying of blue shadows on an almost empty stage, with a back-drop of endless sky.

We are on the road to a great revolution in the psychology of the switchboard. Ever since Garrick brought with him from France the footlight which replaced the ancient chandelier, we have been studying how to rid ourselves of it;



we have a right to discard anything, to introduce any device which will suit our purpose, and still retain the object of illusion while enriching the picture. No one has yet established sufficiently well the arguments for abandoning foot-lights. There have recently been added to the mechanics of stagecraft those electrical accessories which will facilitate the subtle effects of shade and tint.

One sympathizes with the son of Ellen Terry, yet everybody interested in the stage as a civic necessity on one hand, and as an artistic need on the other, will agree that Gordon Craig in "The Art of the Theatre" has carried his theories of stage management a step too far, even as Maeterlinck first did, in formulating his principles for the *static* drama, in claiming for puppet plays substance rather than shadow. No theatre man will deny that Craig's designs of scenes, so shaded as to secure *bas relief* without "foots," are excellent where the relief is needed. No manager is wholly oblivious to the fact that though drama is essentially action, it is also picture, where every line of the scene in its relation with the size and color of the players, where every position, — all mean relative grouping, fixed for balance and perspective. Miss Terry's scenic background for Ibsen's "The Vikings at Helgeland" adequately fulfilled the theory. Let the theatre become a masterpiece of mechanism, with a technique peculiar to itself, with a director above scene painter, actor, playwright, himself more creative than all three put together, — let this bring us a dramatic renaissance, and one will scarce need a written story to compass a plot so quickly flashed upon the mind in light, song, dance, and pantomime.

Many of Mr. Belasco's plays, as plays, are lacking in the qualities which his scenic artistry for the moment supplies. "The Girl of the Golden West" is an excellent example of such. The moving scene down the mountainside to the door of the saloon does succeed marvelously in taking one

out of the street and away from the city. On the other hand, the moving-picture concerns, which to-day threaten the theatre, might well point to this scene as a legitimate excuse for their existence.

But that Mr. Belasco, with his scenery and with his stage business, is inventive, becomes evident in any of his plays. Take "The Rose of the Rancho," where *Juanita* and *Kearney* are seated by the well; the lover moves nearer and nearer, whereupon she seizes the gourd and throws water on the seat between them — a stroke of business worth a page of dialogue. Take "The Warrens of Virginia" — after the war, the Southern General is dozing in his garden; for the space of a second, one hears the sigh of the wind, the spectral roll of drums, the spirit breathing of the bugles — and he awakens — all done with the deft modulation which might have been turned into bathos by the slightest over-accentuation. The manager is thus painting for others.

These are the qualities marking David Belasco, which represent his place in American drama. He is the creative manager who writes his plays by acting them; who, faced by two stenographers, evolves his characters and situations in actual movement, now thinking of a speech which he pins up somewhere for his last act, again jotting down some business, some note about this act or that, but always moving surely toward the completion of the first draft, so as to begin rehearsals. Were some of his plays published just as they are typewritten for the stage, they would be invaluable texts for the amateur playwright; they would point to the plitudinous but none the less absolute fact that the theatre, taken as a whole, demands that the playwright must be master of more than one set of tools.



*Photo. by H. Mille*

HENRY C. DE MILLE



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CASE OF PERCY MACKAYE AND HIS FATHER

Not only has the drama an historical evolution, but, like any other human activity, it is subject to inherited traits, and is influenced by the spirit of the age. Ibsen believed in the theory of imbibing the thoughts that were in the air, rather than in limiting those thoughts by an amount of contradictory reading. There is no doubt, for instance, that through Mr. Carnegie's gift of ten millions of dollars for the furtherance of peace, many more people will be forced to think seriously on the subject, and already there is as much discussion about who will write the great peace drama, as about who will be the great American dramatist.

Subtle forces mould a man, but also evident circumstances. In "Famous Actor-Families in America," I suggested the possibilities of applying Galton's law of inheritance to the material I had gathered from various sources. The method might likewise serve as a measure in determining how far Henry De Mille's career prompted his son, William, to follow the same bent, and in tracing those speculative characteristics of Steele Mackaye which are now evident in his son, Percy. Sons of fathers who hold positions in a profession are most likely to continue in that profession, but whereas young De Mille, furthered by Belasco, uses the theatre more as a business than as an art, young Mackaye is prone to forget the theatre in a commendable, but over-serious, attitude toward art.

The theatre has always been subject to attack; it has always been threatened by poor quality and plethoric quantity. Young De Mille takes things as he finds them, making a reporter's use of a certain dramatic ability; young Mackaye is more morose than rebellious over the theatre, about which he speculates in ideal fashion. But, nevertheless, these men either have to conform to the conventions of the time and to the interests of the period, or else submit to the relentless verdict of the people.

In the days when the Madison Square Theatre, in West Twenty-fourth Street, New York, was the center of theatrical interest, and when the Mallory Brothers combined this business with that of issuing *The Churchman*, which still survives as a religious weekly, theatre managers were reading their own plays. Daly always gave personal attention to the manuscripts sent him. Palmer announced openly that he was not favorable to the native playwright. But, to judge by the personal note-book of Henry De Mille, who read plays with the assistance of Daniel Frohman, Franklin Sargent, and David Belasco, the manuscripts continued to flow into the office of the little playhouse. In three months, during 1883, some two hundred dramas by Americans were read, and the possible subjects were never accepted without material alteration. When Bronson Howard's "Young Mrs. Winthrop" was in preparation, it was rewritten in accordance with a multitude of suggestions, and was then handed over to Belasco, who had already evinced his remarkable gift for certain phases of stage management. The theatre of that day knew what it wanted, and the playwright was whipped into shape. The current papers were then as persistent in their attack upon the insipidity of the Madison Square drama, as critics are to-day upon the pornographic literature which passes for virile thinking.

I believe that both young De Mille and young Mackaye

have an advantage in this race for dramatic honors; it remains to be seen whether they will profit by the past history of the theatre. Their fathers were writing at a time when their contemporaries in dramatic authorship were Bronson Howard, Bartley Campbell, George Jessop, Fred Marsden, A. C. Gunter, Fred Maeder, James J. McClosky, A. R. Cazauran, Edward Harrigan, and H. G. Carleton. William De Mille is greatly in advance of that period, as far as methods and interests are concerned; he is one of the numberless newspaper men who is content with effective incident, and he leaves speculation alone. In "Strongheart," which had a slight problem of Indian blood in it, he failed to do what he wished above all else to do; he originally intended to consider the theme inadequately treated by Edward Sheldon in "The Nigger" (1910). There is nothing pioneer, or even largely stimulating in young De Mille.

Percy Mackaye is of a different stature; he comes out of the past into the present, and his ear and heart have caught certain phrases which remind him of the Golden Age of Greece. De Mille shook from him the cap and gown of Columbia University; Mackaye walks in the shadow of Harvard, with an academic command of literature, and with a poetic gift which is not spontaneous, though it be elaborate and earnestly used. Being a poet, we must compare him with poets.

There is more hope for him than for Stephen Phillips, who has steadily declined in effectiveness since writing "Herod." They both are wedded to the past. Phillips gave us a *Francesca*, Mackaye a *Jeanne D'Arc*; Phillips wrote in the face of Goethe's "Faust," Mackaye in the face of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales." Phillips turned to *Ulysses*, Mackaye to *Sappho* and *Phaon*. In other words, being poets who are using the theatre as a means of poetic communication, rather than as a high end in itself, they

largely adhere to the Shakespeare precedent of finding inspiration for their plots outside of their native imaginations. Unlike John Masefield, whose "Pompey the Great" is a rewriting of history, and is tinged through and through with broad and colorful expressions of democratic strength, they unfold their dialogue in lines of haunting beauty but of reminiscent measure.

Yet Mr. Mackaye possesses a humor which is totally lacking in Phillips, a perspective of the present which allows of such sparkling cynicism as one detects in "Mater" and "Anti-Matrimony," even if it is not sufficiently analyzed to make him an invigorating critic of life, civic and personal.

He is a poet who has "murmurs and scents of the infinite seas," without any deep knowledge of the forces of existence. Stephen Phillips utters haunting lines of pure, sensuous beauty; Mackaye writes lines of equal beauty, but lacking in that simple, lyric passion which makes "Francesca da Rimini" so delicate. It strikes me that Mr. Mackaye as a poet is only a vehicle for unformed and inadequately founded social views. He has poetic quality rather than the abiding strength of the true poet. Occasion has done much to shape his course from the very day that his father locked him, a sixteen-year-old boy, in a room and told him to write a Storm Choral for a Columbian Exposition spectacular, before he could come out.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Percy Mackaye was born in New York, March 16, 1875. He took a Bachelor of Arts degree at Harvard in 1897. He is the author of "A Garland to Sylvia," written while he was in Europe. He matriculated at the University of Leipzig, and his studies there partly resulted in the writing of "Fenris the Wolf" (1905). "The Canterbury Pilgrims" (prose) was published in 1903, "Jeanne D'Arc" in 1906; "Sappho and Phaon" in 1907. "The Scarecrow" (1908), "Mater" (1908), "Anti-Matrimony" (1910), and "Thoroughbreds" (1911) are among his other pieces.

Among his produced plays, "Jeanne D'Arc" (1906) was mounted by Sothorn and Marlowe, Bertha Kalich appeared in "Sappho and



The theatre critic has from generation to generation deplored the fast decaying drama, and has vainly searched for the art spot in the chaos of commercialism on which to rest his hopes and to raise his temple. Traveling through the slough, confident of a bright to-morrow, keen to the civic necessity of the play, Mr. Mackaye is searching for the art centre. He is intensely earnest, and the persistent questions in his prose work, which follow one after the other in logical order, point to undoubted weaknesses in the present theatrical system. But deep conviction on his part, however to be welcomed, does not result in a conviction on our part that endowment on the one hand is the only way to free the theatre of present methods, or that endowment on the other will create a better type of drama, especially of the poetic drama.

Mr. Mackaye's "The Playhouse and the Play" (1909) is a small volume of lectures which have been delivered before university bodies, and which are now slightly added to, but still unchanged as to intimate and personal style. The eye is immediately caught by the frequency of italicized lines; these might be taken as the measure of Mr. Mackaye's argument. The scope is purely local, except where the author's culture seeks to connect the present with Greek civilization. The book is idealistic, not soundly philosophic—idealism based on practical knowledge as a producing playwright. In the building of a civic theatre for the people, in the fitting of the drama to become a vehicle for the ideals of democracy, to clear the theatrical field of its present business standards is only one phase in the education of

Phaon" (1907), Henrietta Crosman in "Anti-Matrimony" (1910). Both "Mater" (1908) and "The Scarecrow" (1911) have likewise been given.

Mr. Mackaye has written many occasional poems and has published a book of essays on the theatre, besides a prose version of Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales" (1904).

dramatic taste. I cannot see that divorcing art from money will immediately improve art or better the supply and demand — although it will clear the theatre atmosphere. Any one at all versed in things of the stage will note the consistency of Mr. Mackaye's "Law of Deterioration," based on such self-evident facts as the preponderance of the emotional demand over the intellectual, brought about by the antagonism between the rational aim of theatrical business and the rational aim of democratic art. Henry Arthur Jones established this condition more fully in his essay: "Our Modern Drama — Is It an Art or an Amusement?"

It is true that what the drama needs is to be subjected to an atmosphere of artistic rather than of business competition. Yet one might justly fear that the removal of the restraining hand of "profit and loss" would largely afford added hope to the *dilettante*, to the disappointed playwright. No suggestion has been offered as to whether or not there would be competent people to run the theatre, or where and how the theatre-goers would receive the education which would make them prefer Charles Rann Kennedy's "The Winterfeast" to comic opera, or Mr. Mackaye's "Mater" to vaudeville. We all deplore the benumbing hand of commercialism, recognizing that business methods, nevertheless, have raised the status of an actor from that of *vagabondia* to that of *professionalism*, but it all depends on what we mean by absolute freedom in the theatre to convince us as to whether absolute endowment will hasten the desired goal.

In his lectures on "The Drama of Democracy" and "The Dramatist as Citizen," Mr. Mackaye is most suggestive; if nothing else, his book will provoke discussion, and in my opinion that is what he wishes, for he is the dramatist beneath it all. The dissemination of whatever seeds of art may be in the American people through channels of least



PERCY MACKAYE AND CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

Taken in the Bohemian Club's Redwood Grove, California, August, 1908



richness has blighted the product. There is the fine art for the few, and the vaudeville for the crowd. Conditions are chiefly responsible for the absence of evidences pointing to a fine art for the many, in other words — to a drama of democracy. Mr. Mackaye has the evil well indicated here; the poet in him feels the pulse of the people. He writes: "The status of the playhouse in society is as vital as the status of the university in society. The dignity and efficiency of the one demand the same safeguard against inward deterioration as the dignity and efficiency of the other. The functions of both are educative."

Young Mackaye sincerely desires to be a citizen, but his social philosophy is weak and his historical perspective is not sufficiently defined to lend authority to the definitions he frames or to the strictures he utters in his numerous lectures and talks. From his father he has learned the use of a certain largeness of scene; from the present he has drawn a certain restlessness and shapeless idealism which are waiting for systematizing. But he has not found himself, and the reason lies, not in the theatrical conditions which surround him, but in the inheritance and the tradition which are his — the inheritance of his father, and the tradition of Harvard University.

James Steele Mackaye was born in Buffalo during 1844, and at the age of seven moved to New York. His father was a man of some means, who had a home just outside of Buffalo, known as Castle Mackaye; while his grandfather, a Scotchman of sturdy build, wore the cloth, and died at the advanced age of one hundred and twenty, boasting of having lived one hundred years in the same parish.

The move to New York was due to legal connections of Mackaye's father, who likewise, as a man of affairs, once held the position of president of the Western Union Telegraph Company. It was not until he went to Paris, at the age of

sixteen, that Steele turned his attention to the stage, and even then there was no opportunity to gratify his interest practically. At eighteen he came back to America, where for sixteen months he served in the army as a member of the Seventh Regiment. Reaching the age of twenty-two, and still intent on the stage, he procured a small engagement at the Old Bowery Theatre in New York, but soon after was sent abroad as an agent for buying pictures. Once more in Paris, he haunted the studios and the theatres, and chance took him in the path of François Delsarte, who recognized in him a startling likeness to his dead son, and who took him under his tutelage.

From now on, and for many years to come, Mackaye was to be an exponent of principles in acting which subdued the old-time ranting, and aimed at the reproduction of natural movement, and of what the papers of the time called "emotionally gentle manner." So closely did the youthful actor identify himself with the methods of his teacher, that he was known in the papers as "Delsarte Mackaye"; but no amount of ridicule could deter him from his set purpose. Later in life, Mackaye wrote:

"A man to be a true actor must not only possess the power to portray vividly the emotions which in any given situation would be natural to himself, but he must study the character of the man whom he impersonates, and then act as that man would act in a like situation. This is what Delsarte taught and what Rachel, Sontag, and Calvalho studied with him."

During 1874, Mackaye lectured extensively on the Delsarte system, speaking of the occult nature of emotion; of the science of expression, illustrated by pantomime; of the necessity for æsthetic gymnastics, illustrated by chromatic scales of emotion in the face and figure.

At that time there was something more or less theoretical

in such a method; people were regarded as *poseurs* who adopted it. Hence it was that Mackaye was spoken of as a speculative dreamer. It is true that throughout life people said of him that his crude idealism was due to defects in his education; his fancies forced him into many experiments which could not possibly find practical fulfilment. But nevertheless, he was of a serious turn of mind, and of an experimental nature, and these characteristics combined to give him a distinct streak of philosophical speculation, which is detected in his utterances upon æsthetics.

When Delsarte found himself in the midst of the Franco-Prussian war, Mackaye was traveling in Switzerland (July, 1870); and on his return to America, hearing that his old friend was in a destitute condition, he immediately arranged for a lecture at Harvard University, the proceeds from which — amounting to ten thousand francs — were sent to Delsarte. The latter died in 1871, bequeathing to his pupil many unpublished manuscripts. There is no discounting Mackaye's enthusiasm over the Delsarte principles; his interest was not only deep, but his execution vivid, so much so that Forrest, listening to him, jumped up in that impetuous manner of his, and exclaimed: "By G—d, my noble boy, you have let in a flood of light!" Not only did he establish a school of acting which should uphold French naturalism, but his first venture in the theatrical field, the St. James Theatre, which opened in January, 1872, was popularly spoken of as the Delsarte house.

At the very outset it is well to emphasize the theatrical rashness of Mackaye and the philosophic severity of his criticism; it is well to note that his theory of acting affected his work, making it self-conscious; while his tendency to experiment made him limit or expand his ideas in mathematical ratio. A man of many failures, he was yet the forerunner of diverse excellent theatrical innovations. His

double stage for the Madison Square Theatre was not as perfect as the revolving platform at the New Theatre, but the principle of usefulness was practically the same. His Spectatorium may have fallen into ruins, carrying with it a fortune and the health of its conceiver, but it foreshadowed the modern Hippodrome. He never profited by failure, and his enthusiasm always made him forgetful of the fact that finance requires practical guarantee. Yet no man of the time, unless it was Henry De Mille, had better opportunity than he to know the physical features of the theatre.

His career as actor opened in 1872, when he appeared in "Monaldi," a Venetian story of the seventeenth century, based on Washington Allston's novel. His pale, classic features, his aquiline nose, his sensitive mouth, his intellectual and quiet expression, all tended to mark this tall, slender, and graceful man with distinction. I have before me a clipping which conveys an impression of Mackaye's nature beneath the practice of his Delsarte methods: "If he were paralyzed from the neck down, he could express more with his face than nine-tenths of justly celebrated actors could with all the appliances which nature and art have given them. His speechlessness is as crammed with expression as a thunder-cloud with electricity." There were stirring within him many conflicting interests; the author, actor, and lecturer did not meet on common ground. During part of 1872, Mackaye was in Paris, studying with Regnier, while in the winter of that year he remained in England, meeting Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, and Tom Taylor. With the latter he was led into further experiment, collaborating in the writing of such plays as "A Radical Fool," "Clancarty," and "Arkwright's Wife." At this time, also, he was prompted to dramatize George Eliot's "Silas Marner"; the matter went as far as his meeting the novelist, but at the crucial point, Lewes, "the dragon," stepped in and put





*Photo. by Sarony*

STEELE MACKAYE

*Act. 35*



a stop to further negotiations. It was in the Spring of this year that Tom Taylor successfully urged Mackaye to appear as *Hamlet*, bringing to his interpretation all the originality of the Delsarte method (May 5, 1872). An edition of the play was issued with notes, and with indication of new stage business.

Evidently Mackaye was encouraged by his start, for I have the record of a booklet, printed in 1872 while he was in Paris, presenting "Extracts from the Press in Reference to the 'Three Months' Dramatic Season of James Steele Mackaye in New York City, from January 8 to April 1, 1872." During that period, Nym Crinkle appears to have come to his rescue, while he was being attacked for his persistency in the Delsarte methods. This was the season of the St. James Theatre, where, on February 1, 1872, Mackaye's "Marriage," an adaptation of Octave Feuillet's "Julie," was given a hearing.

Mackaye's novitiate in the art of playwriting was spent in collaboration and in adaptation, two of the dominant tendencies of the day. Not only this, but the men associated with the Madison Square Theatre reinforced the ideas presented by others. Being actors as well as writers, they knew wherein weak situations might be bettered. So that Mackaye's list of plays, while pointing to technical activity, does not impress one with any striking originality. Here again we find the man meeting with success, yet not sufficiently concentrated to be more than of temporary influence. As an author, he is to be credited with the following:

"Marriage" (1872); "Arkwright's Wife" (1873); "Clancarty" (1874, with Taylor); "Rose Michel" (1875, collaboration); "Queen and Woman" (1876, adaptation from Victor Hugo, with G. V. Pritchard); "Won at Last" (1877); "Through the Dark" (1878); "An Iron Will" (1879, later "Hazel Kirke," 1880); "A Fool's Errand" (1881, adaptation);

"Dakolar" (1884); "In Spite of All" (1885); "Rienzi" (1886, rewritten for Barrett); "Anarchy" (1887); "A Noble Rogue" (1888; also "Money Mad," modeled on the style of Hugo's "Jean Valjean"); "Paul Kauvar" (known as "Anarchy").

The majority of these plays contained melodrama common to that period. It was a period when the physical outlines of the theatre were materially changing; when the old gas-jets, laboriously turned on at each performance, were now on the eve of being simultaneously ignited by an electric spark; when Ogden Doremus was experimenting with asbestos curtains, to give fireproof protection to the theatre; when Mackaye himself was designing orchestra chairs. It was the later day of the Boucicault drama, which had made demands upon the scenic pictures, introducing physical details that were regarded as marvelous. It was the time of Kate Claxton, Ida Vernon, Clara Morris, Montague, Gilbert, Holland, and Ponisi.

Mackaye fell readily into the atmosphere; he imbibed much of the Boucicault technique, without its flexibility, without its humor, without its easy grace and cheerfulness. And yet he was not considered a conservative; on the contrary, the papers regarded him very much as a defier of tradition, especially in comparison with Wallack and Daly. He was only rash, however, in the outward scope of the theatre; for his plays are constructed along conventional lines, with an emotionalism either akin to Boucicault or to Dumas' "Camille."

The five acts of "Won at Last" are epitomized graphically in the program as: "Act I, Ashes; Act II, Embers; Act III, Fire; Act IV, Flame; Act V, Fireside." "Hazel Kirke," which was first presented in 1879 under the title of "The Iron Will," bears all the characteristics of the romantic and melodramatic school of Boucicault. Indeed, critics never

let Mackaye alone about the reminiscent touches to be found in his dramas. Earnest though he always was, and however high his ideals, he could not escape the sensationalism of Tennyson's and Charles Reade's "Dora"; of "Amy Robsart," and of "Rose Michel," which he helped to adapt.

Mackaye and De Mille were a great part of the force of the little Madison Square Theatre — a theatre whose greatest thorns seem to have been the Rev. Dr. G. S. Mallory and Marshall Mallory. They were astute business men, and understood how to obtain the best of any bargain. When Mackaye went to them, the understanding was that he was to relinquish all patents and copyrights for the period of ten years, and that he was to have five thousand dollars and profits under certain conditions. But the contract was not definite enough; on either side it might be disturbed at will. "Hazel Kirke" ran for nearly five hundred nights, with Mackaye every now and then assuming the rôle of *Dunstan*, but whenever the Mallorys had the suspicion that they were losing money, it was a signal for them to try to revoke their contracts. In fact, the theatre of that day was not so good as the theatre of the present. Boucicault was continually involved in litigation, and all dramatists had their successes pirated on every occasion. In 1881, according to one authority, four companies were enjoined for playing distorted versions of "Hazel Kirke."

However much Mackaye may have had the correct idea regarding the close treatment of drama, it was only in the expansiveness of outward detail that he dared depart from the conventional structure. No man realized more philosophically than he that a good play must contain some deep knowledge of human nature, some wide experience of life, and some surety in dealing with the craft of the stage. And he drew from himself and his own ambition, when he stated the requisites of a dramatist to be:

"Mechanical instinct, poetic fancy, sensitive sympathies, passionate fervor and vivid imagination, thoroughness in preparation, industry in elaboration, conscience in revision, courage in excision, and dominating all this, that breadth of mind which breeds humility, and that depth of heart whose understanding love goes out in charity to all mankind."

But though he would have had the process so, plays of the Daly period were not evolved; they were not intensive. Realism was just beginning to modify the romantic glow of "The Two Orphans" and "The Lady of Lyons," while it could hardly be claimed that violent action had been succeeded by rational themes. What Mackaye called "the focal purpose" of a play had not departed from French models or from French emotionalism. Howard, Belasco, De Mille, and Mackaye all came under its spell, the latter speculating upon a way of escape. "The master playwright," so he said, "combines the constructive faculty of the mechanic, and the analytical mind of a philosopher, with the æsthetic instinct of a poet, and the ethical ardor of an apostle."

There is no doubting the truth that Mackaye was serious-minded; in fact, he was continually active, a peculiar combination of a Swedenborgian, a theatrical Edison, and an undisciplined reader of Tyndall, Huxley, and Spencer. His interests lay between religion and civil engineering; he was diversely equipped, and a specialist only in what actual experience had taught him. But he never heeded experience for long, preferring to follow his imagination and his inventiveness. Like all dramatists, he was alive to the moment, and when, in 1887, his "Paul Kauvar" was presented, containing all the earmarks of its kind in flimsy sentiment, verbosity, and theatrical effect, he nevertheless claimed himself to be deeply concerned in the problem of "anarchy," under which name the play was first known.

Notwithstanding the fact that the papers called "Paul

Kauvar" "tumultuous and declamatory," and critics saw in it imitations of Bulwer, the play attracted wide attention, since there was beneath it a slight tinge of contemporaneity, despite its Red Terror atmosphere. For Mackaye, being convinced that demagogues were spreading a spirit of anarchy among the masses, determined to show wherein tyranny was unjust, in the hopes of counteracting a revolutionary spirit which he felt existed among the people. To do this, he demanded a large spectacle, which drew from Nym Crinkle the remarks: "Mr. Steele Mackaye, whatever else he may be, is not a 'lipping hawthorn bud.' He does n't embroider such napkins as the 'Abbé Constantin,' and he can't arrange such waxworks as 'Elaine.' He can't stereoscope an emotion, but he can incarnate it if you give him people enough."

The play was doubtless the outcome of certain ideas which were in the air. It was the old cry which was raised in regard to the influx of emigrants whose excessive poverty, together with the yoke of political oppression, drove them to the new country. But with them Mackaye felt that they brought certain foreign ideas which were inimical to the welfare of the American laborer. So it was that "Anarchy," besides being a melodramatic spectacular, was also a purpose play in the newspaper sense. In 1888, he wrote:

"In the struggle between capital and labor in this country, the grasping spirit of corporations and the demoralizing influence of political corruption are constantly affording the demagogue or the dreamer, who has nothing to lose and everything to gain by the destruction of civil order, an opportunity to preach anarchic doctrines with great plausibility. When I first discovered the large extent to which the passions of the working classes were being played upon by the fine phrases of these insidious foes of the American Republic, I determined to investigate, as carefully as circumstances

would permit, the means by which these foreign influences were seeking to achieve their diabolic results in this country."

After his dispute with the Mallorys, Mr. Mackaye went over to the Lyceum Theatre, on Fourth Avenue, which playhouse soon began to gain prestige under Daniel Frohman, and where E. H. Sothorn was on the eve of large recognition. Mackaye's enthusiasm, his charm of manner and his grace, made him well liked, and he was much more at ease in private talk than in acting. He was a charming conversationalist, and possessed what critics called a mind "ratiocinative, not poetic." Interested in painting, sculpture, teaching, managing, playwriting and inventing, he lacked system; he was devoid of concentration. Philosophically, he was under the influence of the transcendentalists, and even the mystic touches in Delsarte bore evidences of Catholic symbolism. His language, outside his plays, was marked by metaphysical distinctions, seen, for instance, in an excellent letter sent to his son from Chicago, on December 15, 1893, in answer to Percy's objections to changes made in some chorals he had written. The statements show first of all a serious attitude toward all creative work, as well as a modesty which was no small part of his charm; they are likewise evidences of a speculative mind which delighted in analyzing the absolute, the relative, and the conscious in terms of art. This is what he wished to do in his big Columbian spectacle prepared for his Spectatorium; every detail of it was to have philosophical value; even the choruses were to be representative of fine distinctions.

He felt that Percy, at an early age, should have grasped this in the writing of the poetic tasks set before him.

"Everything in the Cosmic order," he said, "is perfect or complete. When I speak of the *Time Chorus*, I mean that which voices the accomplishment of the past. . . . The



*Past Time Chorus*, philosophically, represents the real world, and the *Future Time Chorus* represents the ideal world, while the *Eternity Chorus* represents the essential world — the world of principle or spirit. . . . The spirit of the whole is the perfect spirit — universal spirit — the divine spirit. The spirit of the past is the imperfect spirit and the demoniac spirit.”

His distinctions of mortal and immortal consciousness clearly mark his scattered reading in metaphysical fields.

We now reach the culmination of Mr. Mackaye's life, at the time of the Chicago Exposition of 1893. All his theatrical extravagance overflowed and ran riot in the Columbian Celebration Company, organized to exploit his Spectatorium, a building devised for his entertainment, which was called “Spectatorus.” This was a combination of grand scenic display with Oratorio, in which stage realism was to be carried to its highest perfection. It was to be a Hippodrome in size, with appliances of every conceivable power, so arranged as to create illusions of the noblest order. The stage, called a “Scenitorium”, was to contain an immense reservoir for water effects, and around this were to be grouped Mackaye's remarkable inventions.

It is not necessary to go into details regarding this mammoth shell. In it were to be erected automatic combination stages, allowing of any variety of motions; wave-current makers, for the creation of currents of water which were to be regulated as to velocity and height; wind-current makers, so conceived as to create cyclone velocity from the gentlest breeze; weather-makers, for atmospheric effects, such as large rainbows; illuminoscopes, “by means of which the scope and character of the illumination of the scene can be instantly determined;” colorators, for tints according to the changing hours; nebulators, for cloud effects; and a luxauleator, which was to be a dazzling sheet of light to take

the place of a curtain. Examining the large scope of Mackaye's idea, it is surprising how near he came to the conception of a Hippodrome. He aimed at mechanical duplication of Nature; mechanical acceleration of mystery. The production in such a huge machinery was to be called a "Spectatorio," which was "a species of performance celebrating a theme which may be either historic, fabulous, or fanciful. It illustrates its subjects by great pictures — whose stories are told in pantomime, and whose sentimental, ethical, or ideal meaning is celebrated or interpreted by music." On one hand he had in mind the most extravagant display of Barnum; on the other he accepted as a model Cody's Wild West Show. Undoubtedly the educational vastness of such an enterprise met with some enthusiasm and support; preparations actually began for the mounting of "The Great Discovery," which was to epitomize the life of Columbus. The financial figures of returns were chimerical, with the seating capacity of over ten thousand people, and the other sources of income to cover the initial expenditure of nearly a million dollars. The structure was to have occupied the northeastern corner of Jackson Park.

Any one in the theatre will understand that the very magnitude of the undertaking was enough to handicap business and to kill the man in control. Mackaye's whole nervous system went to pieces as he saw the money slipping from his hands. The Spectatorium was only a skeleton when the company went into the hands of a receiver because of depression in Wall Street. His brain teeming with projects, Mackaye was able, through a natural gift of persuasiveness, to carry any amount of enthusiasm. But now he was completely broken in health. He was given a benefit which enabled him to start on a trip to California, but on his way, while passing through Timpas, Colorado, he died aboard the train, on February 25, 1894.

In this career we find many evidences of the son, Percy, writer of dramas; of the son, James, instructor at Harvard, and author of a philosophical, sociological discussion of "The Economy of Happiness"; and of the son whose interest in nature is marked.<sup>1</sup> The speculative tendency is in the Mackaye blood, and a staid seriousness. Yet Percy has a keen sense of humor which he realized in "Mater" and in "Anti-Matrimony," but sedulously governs because of his Harvard training. Steele Mackaye, in his experiments, foreshadowed the present possibilities of the mechanical stage; he would have been greater had he possessed restraint. Curiously, his son, Percy, is handicapped by this very quality of restraint.

<sup>1</sup> There was also a son whose stage career was cut short. A daughter, Hazel, has been on the stage. Mrs. Steele Mackaye is the author of several dramatizations which have been published.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE CARDBOARD PLAY AND THE WELL-MADE PLAY: AUGUSTUS THOMAS AND WILLIAM GILLETTE

#### I

THERE is no strict grievance against the outward excellence of the cardboard play. It is planned according to the latest devices, and its structure is pleasing to the eye. Yet it is like a house untenanted, like a shell without the kernel.

It is of the utmost importance that drama be externalized, that its scenes be proportioned and in good taste. But this does not mean that the yard-stick measurements of the average manager are sufficient to guarantee a success in his theatre. Every play is subjected to the same processes of preparation; the extravaganza as well as the problem drama has its scene and its costume; and every play, whatever its scope or character, has to be rehearsed.

In mounting a comic opera, the stage manager is chiefly concerned with pleasing the eye; the attention is here carried in channels of least mental exertion. In the final analysis of any effect created in this manner, audiences feel that they have been cheated, since the light and paint of the stage are only accessories, veritable appetizers for the imagination, and do not take the place of nature. The *Rosalind* of the boards lacks the fresh youth of the *Rosalind* of the greensward.

On the other hand, in mounting a straight drama, with any serious undercurrent of motive, it is incumbent upon

the stage manager to be particular about harmonizing scene with idea. He leaves this to his working staff, more than likely, thoroughly content if, during rehearsal, he detects any variety of design, any new effect of novel action. A theatre man once said to me, not realizing the poignant truth of his statement: "I hear with my eyes, and see with my ears."

It is not an easy matter to balance consistency with action, and it is well-nigh impossible for the dramatist, if he be lacking in psychological situation, to insert it after his play is written; he is continually forced to recast his dialogue so as to make possible certain motives and certain actions.

From the moment a dramatic author conceives his plot, to the first night, he travels the long road of preparation; considering how long, it is a wonder that more plays are not silently withdrawn before they are publicly condemned. But the theatrical manager finds himself economically in the position of a landlord whose houses have to be filled, and the danger of the situation lies in the fact that he has more comfortable theatres than he has deserving dramas. That is why he leans so heavily upon the cardboard play. If it is weak on the first night, it may be bolstered up the next morning. The manager and author have had time to watch the effect of scenes and of bits of dialogue upon the people. The "prompt copy" of every play contains marks indicating where those "in front" laughed, where they cried, where they were confused. And then the play is touched up, cut here, or shifted and heightened there. I remember hearing Augustus Thomas, during the second night of "Mrs. Leffingwell's Boots," make plans to change certain spots that did not seem quite "to get over the foots."

The true dramatic author is always thoroughly alive to the surroundings of his play, to the precise atmosphere of his scene. While he leaves it to the art of the stage carpenter and of the scene painter to perfect his mental picture in

projection, nevertheless, in the writing of his play the dramatist allows atmosphere to affect his dialogue as well as his action.

Not only details of furniture, of dress, of architecture, *decorate* the moment in the story, but each object of external position measures the temperament and the personality of the character, or group of characters, approaching the climax of the particular incident in life called a drama.

Clyde Fitch read me the script of "The City," and in describing to me the *locale*, he indicated how the trees were placed on the lawn of the country house; he saw plainly the living-room in which the tragedy of the first act was to take place. The ground-plan of the entire play was as *real* as though he had himself lived with his people. To him the essential fact was that his family, which he had chosen for "The City," could not possibly live in any other kind of house. He had his scene built, he selected his furniture, he clothed his actors, to satisfy his *sense of environment*.

It is evident, therefore, that the first two things to be done, after a play is chosen for production, are to have the stage director make sketches of the scene, while the dramatist — if he be well known — or the stage manager, begins to "cast" the characters. Mr. Fitch always personally superintended these details. Compare a preparatory sketch of scenes for "The Music Master" with the scene finally adopted, after Mr. Belasco's practical alterations. That which was taken from the original sketch had to be discarded for purposes of stagecraft. Nothing is done toward actually building the scenery for a play until the sketches have been approved, and until the "model" has been constructed. Then the carpenter and painter are allowed to begin their work.

The preliminary drawings made for a production include costume sketches of varied design and color. Even as an

artist or a sculptor makes diverse outlines of arms, and eyes, and noses, so the costumer prepares "boot plots," "fan plots," and studies out carefully, if his play calls for archaic setting, every detail relating to the dress of his period.

From an orchestra chair, one does not fully realize the amount of ingenuity required in preparing the cardboard surroundings for an historical, a fantastical, or a romantic play. Dances peculiar to locality, as in Mary Austin's "The Arrow Maker," or in Richard Walton Tully's "The Rose of the Rancho," or in Victor Herbert's "Natoma," have to be worked out by diagram. Colors have to be massed and harmonized, and characters have to be kept within the tone of the picture. When large choruses are used, the care in such detail must be constant. The Hippodrome always makes use of immense ballets, where, if one but half close his eyes, blurring the individuals, a spectrum-scheme of the whole is observed. Masses of color are circulated in well-conceived, sinuous design — geometry turned into the poetry of motion.

The cardboard aspects of a play are in the hands of four men: the scene painter, the stage carpenter, the electrician and the property man. Each at first does his work separately, but in such a way that when all come together, their "effects" dovetail. The mounting of a play is much like a cut-up puzzle; there is a very definite design somewhere, which the stage manager has in mind. Even in the acting of a play, rehearsals are conducted in fragments, the players going off to odd corners of the room to discuss their "business," while others are doing a scene under the direct supervision of the dramatist. Mr. Fitch was an indefatigable worker at rehearsal; Mr. Thomas possesses the happy faculty of keeping the actors interested.

The play is practically rehearsed by the time scenery and costumes are ready; the actors are "letter perfect," and

are fairly familiar with the "properties" which they are going to use. Up to this time, the king has probably sat upon a kitchen chair for his throne; the princess has dropped upon the bare boards of the dusty stage for the greensward; while the retainers of the palace have had a veritable Belshazzar's feast, without even the assistance of *papier maché* venison. I attended several rehearsals of "*Pelléas et Mélisande*," when Oscar Hammerstein was preparing Debussy's opera. In the balcony scene, *Mélisande*, dressed in a street gown, with a toque, made believe she was shaking out her golden locks; while up an ordinary house ladder climbed the love-consumed *Pelléas*, in a brown frock coat and derby hat! It is at such moments that all arguments as to the need of scenery and costume are difficult to offset with any plea for not needing scenery at all. It has its legitimate uses; its undoing is bad taste, which leads to repletion.

The theatre people do not proceed blindly in their building of the cardboard play; while they are usually lavish in their scenic scope, they know what they want before they look for it; it may not be the right thing, or the most artistic thing, but it suits their limited purposes. They are quicker to discover a flaw in stage-setting than to question the intellectual value of their amusement; hence, their visual power far exceeds their critical judgment. They usually possess a "scenario" knowledge of the play, which they apply to their "stage model," in which draperies, furniture, ornaments, and those numberless details grouped under the name of "properties," are accurately placed. One can imagine the necessity for this doll house, this facsimile of the larger thing, this miniature theatre. But the mental measurement of the cardboard play goes no further, as far as the average manager is concerned.

The perfection to which the cardboard play has been brought is at once its asset and its weakness. It is so easy



to interest the eye with devices, that the manager has reached the point where he can disguise a threadbare plot beneath mechanical novelty. No criticism can be brought against the manager that he is miserly in his outlay for an "attraction." Fortunes are spent every year in the cardboard houses, which amuse the eye but which bring no profit to the mind or imagination. To judge by the character of plays produced in a season, the professional "reader" for a theatre watches more for effect than for content. Dependence is placed, not so much on the dramatist as on the theatre staff of trained mechanics. The danger to the American playwright, which lurks in this dependence, is that he transfers his psychological values from character to scene.

Undoubtedly there is art in the external drama, but its perfection is the danger we have to guard against. Commercialization will exist in this phase, just as long as the period of preparation is spent on "effect." For on the first night, with the scene set, the lights lit, the "properties" placed, and the actors at work, the manager is often forced to realize too late that he has no play.

## II

Clyde Fitch possessed ingenuity; so does Augustus Thomas. Clyde Fitch depended very largely on external detail, as in "Girls"; Augustus Thomas piled up eccentric marks to such an extent in "The Other Girl" that persons who did not know Broadway could not understand it. In "The City," Mr. Fitch proved, just before his death, that he could handle a powerful theme, however disagreeable; in "The Witching Hour" and subsequent dramas, Mr. Thomas clearly shows that the cardboard play is no longer sufficient to carry his new interests.

Mr. Thomas' early pieces, "Alabama" (1891), "In

'Mizzoura'" (1893), and "Arizona" (1900) dealt with a life which stirred with something more than smart-set witticism and city environment. Then followed a period when French technique gripped him, and he has never escaped his indebtedness to the foreign facility for making conversation. His broad comedy period encouraged him to draw upon his newspaper observation, and to produce plays deliciously clever but effervescent.

Most of his plots were fragile, slender threads of experience to carry his fine sense of humor. "Mrs. Leffingwell's Boots" (1905) is an apt example of this. On the other hand, "The Earl of Pawtucket" (1903), a *Dundreary* and *Chumley* imitation, and "On the Quiet" (1901) proved to be farces of excellent pattern. Meeting success with the former, through the acting success of Lawrence D'Orsay, Thomas produced another play, "The Embassy Ball" (1905), scintillating but flimsy, a species of wit which in no way touched the heart, and unhappily distorted American types.

Mr. Thomas has technique at his finger's end; he is a man of the world, with a reporter's instinct for timely interests. As all dramatists should be, he is thoroughly familiar with American life, and since his broad comedy period, his observation and his thought have deepened. Born in St. Louis, Mo., on January 8, 1859,<sup>1</sup> he was public-school bred; became page-boy in Washington during the Forty-first Congress; studied law; became a writer and illustrator for such papers as the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, the St. Louis *Republic*, the Kansas City *Times*, the Kansas City *Mirror* (1886), the Northwestern *Miller*, and the New York *World*. Six years were passed in the freight department of a railroad, and with

<sup>1</sup> See Dithmar, "Augustus Thomas," *Bookbuyer*, May, 1898, 16:323; "Hoosier Doctor," *Critic*, N. S., 27:286; "The Meddler," *Critic*, N. S., 30:297.



*Photo. by Schloss*

AUGUSTUS THOMAS



his knowledge of law he made ready to enter politics. His interest in the latter is constantly manifest.

His debut as dramatist was made when, in 1887, he dramatized Mrs. F. H. Burnett's "Editha's Burglar" and also acted in it. Before this, as early as sixteen, he wrote plays like "Alone" and "A Big Rise," for amateurs.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Thomas is the author of three plays that, while they show the technique for which he is justly noted, likewise sound an interest in telepathy. These are "The Witching Hour" (1908), a manuscript which he had held for ten years, until the time was opportune; "The Harvest Moon" (1909), and "As a Man Thinks" (1911). In "The Witching Hour" a psychology of suggestion, of intimidation, is developed with more consistency and with equally as much dramatic effectiveness as in Charles Klein's "The Third Degree." "The Harvest Moon," while not as interesting a plot, serves further to convince one of the belief in Thomas's sincere interest in subconscious effect. His science is rudimentary; his exposition such as a man who had *seen* these phenomena would describe them. But none the less are they interesting, and dramatically effective. Some may say that Mr. Thomas's

<sup>1</sup> A full list of Mr. Thomas's plays would include "A Man of the World" (1889); "Reckless Temple" (1890); "Afterthoughts" (1890); dramatization of F. Hopkinson Smith's "Colonel Carter of Cartersville" (1892); "The Capitol" (1894); "New Blood" (1894); "The Man Upstairs" (1895); "The Overcoat" (1898); "The Hoosier Doctor" (1898); "The Meddler" (1898); "Oliver Goldsmith" (1900); "Colorado" (1901); "Soldiers of Fortune" (1902); "The Education of Mr. Pipp" (1903), based on Gibson's pictures; and "De Lancey" (1905). On a souvenir program for a special performance of "The Harvest Moon," given on Oct. 28, 1909, for the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite, of which Mr. Thomas is a member, I note these additional plays: "The Burglar," "A Night's Frolic," "A New Year's Call," "Surrender," "For Money," "A Proper Impropriety," "The Music Box," "Chimmie Fadden," "The Jucklins," "That Overcoat," "The Ranger." I have seen casual reference to "In Illinoy" and "Don't Tell Her Husband."

attitude toward the theatre is unscholastic; but if we stop to think, the theatre is never scholastic; it rises upon the popular interests of the people. It is not necessary for a drama success to be literature. I remember Mr. Thomas summing up a few of his plays in this fashion:

“‘Alabama,’ if it were produced now, would have no special audience or following. It came at a time, however, when the country was tired of sectional strife, and when it believed there should be a reconciliation. Colonel Henry Watterson said, in two public speeches, and also editorially, that up to the time of the production of ‘Alabama,’ he had had no assistance of any kind to bring about this reconciliation between the sections, and that ‘Alabama’ did more in one night than he had been able to do in ten years.

“‘Arizona,’” he continued, “was played just at the time of the Spanish War, and had to do with the raising of a volunteer regiment — young men going to the front.

“‘The Other Girl’ was popular when the prize fighter was an idol in New York, just after the repeal of the Horton Law. ‘The Witching Hour’ is a seizure of the general attention that is given to telepathy and allied topics. And under all that, lies my own theory, expressed on more than one occasion, that the theatre is a place for the visualizing of ideas — that the theatre is vital only when it is visualizing some idea then and at the time in the public mind. The theatre is a vital part of everyday life; it is an institution, and as an institution it has a claim upon the popular attention principally in that fact. When it becomes a thing preservative, a museum for certain literary forms, or a laboratory for galvanizing archaic ideas, it is almost useless, and seldom successful as a business enterprise.”

In “As a Man Thinks,” Mr. Thomas’s vision is no longer fragmentary. Once he used to read his papers too assiduously, but now he has added to this a wider culture and a

deeper understanding. The organic unity is purely intellectual, yet his dialogue is so excellently constructed that one does not realize how many problems he drops at will, attacking the next with equal vigor and freshness. The interesting point to note about Mr. Thomas's telepathic dramas is that he not alone states a problem; in addition, he assumes an attitude. This is why "As a Man Thinks" is invigorating.

Where Mr. Thomas has grown is in the manifold variety of his statements; in the digested, rather than in the reflected, opinions he expresses. "As a Man Thinks" should easily win its way on the Continent; by its French technique it should be an example to Henri Bernstein. But notwithstanding, it has, in its last act — which is a play in itself — what the American people epitomize as "uplift." The title of this play is simply a variation of the biblical phrasing, "As ye sow, so shall ye reap." The play itself has no single purpose, but on the other hand it has no indefinite suggestiveness.

Never has Mr. Thomas dipped his ladle into the crucible of life with more effect; never has he had surer grip of the handle. As a man thinks, so are his plays. There is every evidence in this latest one (1911) that Mr. Thomas is thinking. And because of that, he has ceased placing so much dependence upon the cardboard house. His dramas are always well mounted; they always contain atmosphere in their scenes; they are always well dressed and well acted. But there is something beyond the witticism of lines in Thomas of the present period. He has the same brilliancy, but he also possesses dignity and seriousness. His next play may contain authority. That is the direction of his growth.

## III

William Gillette is another American dramatist who is master of the well-made play—a species that involves the cardboard characteristics used with reticence. He was born in Hartford, Conn., on July 24, 1855,<sup>1</sup> his family lineage comprising many noted names. His father was at one time United States Senator and a man of keen intellect; among his relatives he counts Henry Ward Beecher and Charles Dudley Warner. Young Gillette's education was carefully conducted. It seems that as far back as nursery days, the boy owned his miniature theatre, and was quick in his mechanical inventions. Thus equipped, Gillette, as early as 1877, had received a certain amount of theatrical training.

It is the primary object of every dramatist to amuse an audience. It is the primary object of every audience to seek amusement. But there are standards of pleasure as there are standards of morality, and we have to question our right to enjoy, as we question our right to live. Amusement varies with the type of play, and this type varies with the grade of playhouse.

Now, it is the primary object of William Gillette to amuse, and every audience that he draws is given healthy amusement. His standard of pleasure is simple: to hold the attention by appealing to a childlike thirst in all of us for a story and for excitement. His types of play are so varied that we find different pleasure in "The Private Secretary" from that in "Secret Service." Only once did Mr. Gillette approach a problem; that was in "The Admirable Crichton" which J. M. Barrie wrote. As a dramatist himself, Mr.

<sup>1</sup> The Green Room Book states 1856. He was educated at Yale and Harvard, and the Massachusetts Fine Arts Institute. He made his first appearance as an actor in 1875. In 1881, he wrote "The Professor."



Gillette has never had any other purpose than to amuse; and he has reached his effects through farce and melodrama. These two elements have been raised to the highest grade through superlative workmanship; they have been found appropriate for the best audiences because of the stage management and the peculiarly individualistic acting of Mr. Gillette. "Sherlock Holmes" (1899) is example of a rousing melodrama, constructed in harmony with his method of acting.

Joseph Jefferson once said that he had no set ambition to uplift the stage, and in consequence his memory is sweet rather than invigorating. William Gillette has claimed that he cares nothing for critical theories; that when he has reached the heart of the masses, he knows he is right. He does not seek to prove any problem. But as a dramatist, he has been able to demonstrate that neither farce nor melodrama needs to sacrifice the essential qualities of humanity.

In "The Private Secretary" there is a lovable atmosphere surrounding the diffident minister, no matter how ridiculous the positions in which he is placed. Throughout "Sherlock Holmes," the great detective and *Dr. Watson* are forceful characters, apart from the situations of force through which they make their appeal. There is no doubt in my mind as to how much of this is due to William Gillette, the actor. These rôles, which have made his stage career, have themselves been made by his method of acting — tense, mostly silent, persistently dominant, and, as Norman Hapgood once wrote, deeply theatrical and stealthy. Upon the stage he is quiet, slow, dignified; his style is one of nervous repression, of dry humor that is incisive and subtle. Such slowness, in the midst of rapid action, of tense situation, is peculiar to this actor alone.

Mr. Gillette has written many plays since he began his career as dramatist in 1881. There were divers failures

between successes; his last indiscretion — "Electricity" (1910) — aiming to be a vehicle for so slight an actress as Marie Doro, was totally lacking in brilliancy or in deftness of workmanship; it was nothing more nor less than a cardboard play of the commercial type.

With the aid of Mrs. F. H. Burnett, beginning as Thomas began, he wrote "Esmeralda" in 1881;<sup>1</sup> he adapted "Digby's Secretary" from the German (1884), and "She" from Rider Haggard's novel (1887). From the French and German he took many situations. But he could so transmute ideas as to make "Because She Loved Him So" (1899) and "Sherlock Holmes" essentially his own, even though the former was taken from the French, and the latter from Sir Conan Doyle's stories. Some say even that "The Private Secretary" lurks on the German stage. As examples of his own originality, therefore, we have to turn to "Held by the Enemy" (1886), "Too Much Johnson" (1894), "Secret Service" (1896), and "Clarice" (1905).

There is no system in Gillette, the dramatist; in this respect he is much more difficult to characterize than as an actor. For if we say that his dramas represent "well-made" plays, we attribute to them an artificiality which is usually attributable to Scribe. Were I to measure the dramatist by "The Private Secretary," I should claim that while it was looselystrung and faithfully modelled along conventional lines of farce, at least it was excellently illustrative of the *genre*. Were I to measure him by "Held by the Enemy," I should call it typical melodrama, which had just failed in its aim for consistency and truth, even though it foreshadowed a better

<sup>1</sup> Among other plays by Mr. Gillette, may be mentioned "A Legal Wreck" (1888); "All the Comforts of Home" (1890, from the German); "Mr. Wilkinson's Widows" (1891); "Settled Out of Court" (1892, from the French); "Ninety Days" (1893). He also wrote a one-act piece, "The Painful Predicament of Sherlock Holmes" (1905).



*Photo. by Frank Warner*

WILLIAM GILLETTE



drama and reflected in the war correspondent something of the "Private Secretary." "Secret Service" has all the tone and color of Southern feeling during the Civil War; atmospherically it holds all the stress and strain. Southerners, treasuring memories of the sectional struggle, have succumbed to its appeal. Mr. Herne's "Griffith Davenport" alone can be compared with it; by its side, Bronson Howard's "Shenandoah" is stagey.

In these sophisticated days, audiences are looking for motives, for powerful scenes, for emotional psychology. From the motive standpoint, Mr. Gillette might have been led to write a play of purpose, after appearing in "The Admirable Crichton" — one of the most delightful of speculative satires. But he was content to amuse himself with the character of the *Butler*, a rôle which fitted exactly into the eccentricities of Mr. Gillette, the actor. Once he allowed himself to stretch beyond his limitations, and in his own adaptation of Bernstein's "Samson," he entered the realm of emotion. But he is distinctively unemotional. Even in simple love scenes, such as one finds in "Secret Service" and in "Clarice," he makes appeal through the sentiment of situation, through the exquisite sensitiveness of outward detail, rather than through romantic attitude and heart fervor.

It has gone against the grain for Mr. Gillette to be purposeful; one would think that this might lead to his being prolific. But Mr. Gillette is the most cautious of dramatists. Fundamentally, he is right regarding his belief that audiences wish to be amused. Life has enough worries without going to the theatre to be worried. Therefore, he turns on green lights in "Sherlock Holmes" — the same green lights that illuminate the page of "Ragged Dick" — and people who have patronized Ibsen's "The Wild Duck" and "Rosmersholm," sit enthralled. He dramatizes a cigar in "Secret

Service" and in "Sherlock Holmes," using it also to effect in Barrie's "The Admirable Crichton." As a dramatist, Mr. Gillette has done much to prove the legitimacy of melodrama; he has demonstrated that violence alone in art separates Broadway from the Bowery.

Mr. Gillette and Mr. Thomas are the only ones of our living dramatists who have successfully demonstrated that the cardboard play does not have to be shallow; that it is, in fact, a virtue when its organism is understood and is not over-worked. For no matter how subtle an idea, the play is a concrete thing.

## CHAPTER X

### CONCERNING CLYDE FITCH AND THE LOCAL SENSE

THERE are three important elements involved in the writing of a play: the sense of situation, the sense of characterization, and the sense of dialogue. If regarded in the light of recent stagecraft, it will be seen that no matter what the type of play may be, no matter what the problem of the play may be, the infinite ramifications found in a perfectly constructed drama are usually gathered together under these three fundamental heads. Our American dramatist has to a very commendable and remarkable degree mastered within recent years two of these characteristics. Living in an atmosphere where situation dominates every corner of our national existence, it is not strange that his eye should be trained to catch the essentials of the moment. This quickness on his part is due not only to inherited tendencies, but to training as well.

Moreover, being particularly keen as to the *how* and the *wherefore*, rather than the *why*, the American is prone to draw from national existence that which he asks for, and to receive answer from his fellows according to the value, the force of the question he puts. This *modus operandi* constitutes the distinct school of training in which our American playwright has thus far been educated.

Let us consider for a moment the statement made before, that among our younger men who are essaying the dramatic form as a means of expression, the larger number have been

at some period of their careers engaged in newspaper reporting. What bearing has this fact upon their workmanship? First, it has required of the reporter, who is after daily occurrences, to grasp the essential points in a story, to make use only of those factors which will picturesquely represent in a rapid fashion the progress of a tragedy or the narration of a situation. The reporter is furthermore required to sense this situation with his eye; his style must be shaped so as to depict that process of visual motion. Color and action are his goal. The error of his way lies in his absolute ignoring of the logical sequence of events on one hand, and in his failure to recognize the difference between relative and true proportion on the other. Not so very long ago, in conversation with Augustus Thomas, I was not surprised to find him confessing that to his newspaper experience he owes his success as a writer of dialogue. To his way of thinking, the value of an interview rests in the dexterity with which the incisive, the irresistible, the compelling question is put. What, after all, is drama but the interchange of just this kind of talk?

In England, Pinero is one of the prolific writers of plays. I have elsewhere called attention to the fact that had not the dramatic instinct been uppermost, Pinero would have been a novelist; and this same statement is true of Clyde Fitch. The man who has the ability to tell a story, and to tell it in an easy, interesting fashion, possesses the art of the narrator. But if in addition he sees the story in action, he is somehow forced to tell it in accordance with the form which action demands. In other words, whenever the novelist introduces into his book an active interchange of personality with personality, he is compelled to use the very form that distinguishes drama; that is, dialogue. The playwright translates life wholly in terms of action, in terms of conversation, in terms of situation. His idea must almost





*Photo. by Sarony*

CLYDE FITCH



invariably be involved closely with the effects of this idea on the characters of his play, and on the development of the plot of his play. This is not saying, in reference to novel writing, that we may cut the dialogue from a book, and piece it together, thus making a play. This method has been the cause of so many failures consequent upon the hasty dramatization of novels. The essential structure of each form is different, and it is this difference in the framework of these two forms of art that made Arthur Wing Pinero in London and Clyde Fitch in New York, dramatists rather than novelists.

The latter was comparatively a young man at the time of his death, yet the body of his work — which never showed abatement in its increasing proportions — is so large as to overcloud by its very profuseness the pleasing qualities which it assuredly has.<sup>1</sup> The gift of writing dialogue easily,

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fitch was born at Elmira, New York, May 2, 1865; educated at Amherst College; wrote the following plays: "Beau Brummel"\* (1890); "Betty's Finish" (1890); "Frédéric Lemaitre" (1890); "A Modern Match" (1891, subsequently played as "Marriage"); "Pamela's Prodigy" (1891); "The Masked Ball," from the French (1892); "The Harvest" (1893, which play, in one act, was presented before the Letters and Arts Club) [the plot was afterwards used in "The Moth and the Flame"]; "A Shattered Idol," from the French (1893); "The American Duchess," from the French (1893); "The Social Swim" (1893); "Mrs. Grundy, Jun.," from the French (1894); "His Grace de Grammont" (1894); "April Weather" (1894); "Mistress Betty" (1895, subsequently revised and produced in 1905 as "The Toast of the Town" †); "Gossip," with Leo Ditrichstein (1895); "Bohemia," from the French (1896); "The Liar," from the French (1896); "A Superfluous Husband," with Leo Ditrichstein (1897); "Nathan Hale"\* (1898); "The Moth and the Flame" (1898); "The Head of the Family," from the German, with Leo Ditrichstein (1898); "The Cowboy and the Lady" (1899); "Barbara Frietchie"\* (1899); "Sapho," from the French (1900); "The Climbers"† (1900); "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines"\* (1901); "Lover's Lane" (1901); "The Last of the Dandies" (1901); "The Way of the World" (1901); "The Girl and the Judge" (1901); "The Marriage Game," from

the excellent distinction of being endowed with a prolific, inventive talent, are sometimes dangerous, even though they may be fortunate qualities to own. If the dramatist working at high speed would only take time to realize that his rapidity of execution is due solely to his employment of only two out of the three elements underlying all drama, the net result of his product would be of more permanent value, because he would then become aware of the fact that he is not making full use of the third element. The *idea* in a drama is the vital spot in its construction.

From the time that Mr. Fitch graduated from Amherst College, he was actively engaged with his pen, beginning by writing lighter verse, and also by working out some prose sketches which cannot be termed fiction in the true sense of the word. "The Knighting of the Twins, and Ten Other Tales" (1891),<sup>1</sup> is now little known though it contains most charming delineations of child life. To the student of Mr.

the French (1901); "The Stubbornness of Geraldine"† (1902); "The Girl with the Green Eyes"† (1902); "The Frisky Mrs. Johnson," from the French (1903); "The Bird in the Cage" (1903); "Algy" (1903); "Her Own Way"† (1903); "Glad of It" (1903); "Major André" (1903); "The Coronet of a Duchess" (1904); "Granny" (1904); "Cousin Billy" (1904); "The Woman in the Case" (1904); "Her Great Match" (1905); "Wolfville" (1905); "The Girl Who Has Everything" (1906); "Toddles," from the French (1906); "The House of Mirth," with Mrs. Wharton (1906); "The Truth" (1906); "The Straight Road" (1906); "Her Sister" (1907); "The Blue Mouse," adapted from the German (1908); "Girls" (1908); "A Happy Marriage" (1909); "The Bachelor" (1909); "The City" (1910). Mr. Fitch died at Châlons-sur-Marne, September 4, 1909. A gossip account of "The Clyde Fitch I Knew" has been published by Archie Bell. Its chief excellence lies in a few flashes of Mr. Fitch's vivacious personality and in the chronology of his work.

The plays marked thus (\*) have been published; those marked thus (†) belong to an excellent inexpensive series of Mr. Fitch's plays which the Macmillan Company issued.

<sup>1</sup> Republished (1911).

Fitch's dramas they suggest those main characteristics of his own attitude toward life and the conditions of life which dominated most of his later stage work. For by temperament Mr. Fitch was a sentimentalist, and because of temperament he viewed the details of environment in their bearing upon feeling.

Mr. Fitch was, to a certain degree, also a realist, if by realism we mean the handling of everyday occurrences and of the familiar natural problems of existence; but his realistic data was usually subjected to a high light of what at one moment we might term German romanticism and at another moment French sentimentalism. Much as quite a few of his plays have been discussed from the standpoint of their feminine suggestiveness and from the standpoint of their feminine sensuous interests, in point of morality Mr. Fitch was wholly conventional. His cleverness in overcoming this conventional tendency rested on his theatrical employment of the *unusual*. In other words, in point of visual sense, Mr. Fitch's observation of little things was about as sane as that of any other living dramatist, his fault being that he failed to bring his minute observation in relation with any large, vital, or sustained idea.

In 1897, Mr. Fitch published a little volume entitled "The Smart Set : Correspondence & Conversations." It is another example of the insistent dramatist who obtrudes himself over and above the story-teller in the writing of a book. It contains the attitude of the dialogue, and so we may claim that Mr. Fitch was a born playwright, in the double sense that in expressing himself he perforce had to use dialogue, and in viewing life he invariably felt compelled to estimate it in terms of situation. His undoing was that he lacked the consuming idea.

As far as dramatic belief is concerned, Mr. Fitch was thoroughly sincere. He lived up to his convictions as to

what drama should be in general, and he expressed his convictions in the following terms:

"I feel myself very strongly the particular value — a value which, rightly or wrongly, I can't help feeling inestimable — in a modern play, of reflecting absolutely and truthfully the life and environment about us; every class, every kind, every emotion, every motive, every occupation, every business, every idleness! Never was life so varied, so complex. . . . Take what strikes you most, in the hope it will interest others; take what suits you most to do — what perhaps you can do best, and then do it better. Be truthful, and then nothing can be too big, nothing should be too small, so long as it is here and there. . . . If you inculcate an idea in your play, so much the better for your play and for you and for your audience. In fact, there is small hope for your play as a play, if you have not some idea in it, somewhere and somehow, even if it is hidden. It is sometimes better for you if it is hidden, but it must of course be integral. . . . One should write what one sees, but observe under the surface. It is a mistake to look at the reflection of the sky in the water of theatrical convention; instead, look up and into the sky of real life itself."

This quotation contains the essence of Mr. Fitch's attitude toward life. It shows him prone to place idea throughout his work in a secondary position, and he thus unconsciously became a very true critic of himself. For he was given to infuse into his picturesque entertainments some small semblance of ideas, which, while not seemingly vital, were so commonplace as to have intimate connection with the human side of his audiences. "The Climbers," "The Girl with the Green Eyes," "The Girl and the Judge," "Her Own Way," — each of these contains an element of *live* meaning, apart from the mere interest of story or attractiveness of scene; and this very presence of a suggestion of the

vital spark in drama is what made one most regretful regarding Mr. Fitch as a dramatist. For he had that within him, out of which worthy dramatic literature might have been evolved.

The general impression was that he did not make good, for the very reason that his ideas never seemed to arrive. That he was not consciously imitative of foreign models is observable by the fact that whenever he attempted to absorb foreign situations, whenever he adapted French pieces, such as "Sapho," those qualities for which he might be justly praised were either corrupted or wholly absent from the scene. But Mr. Fitch was not indifferent to foreign activity, especially as manifest in the modern French dramas. Curiously, he welcomed in them just those large and significant characteristics which, had he possessed them, would have placed him in the front ranks of the progressive dramatic movement. He once said: "No one at the present moment is getting the essence of his environment in thought, word, and deed, as Hervieu, Lavedan, Donnay, Capus: Capus with the idea for the basic principle, the idea serious; Lavedan and Donnay, the idea social; Capus all sorts of ideas together, any old idea so long as it is always life — especially the life superficial, with the undercurrent really kept under."

Our American dramatist has, during the past decade, developed within himself a tremendous sense of *locality*. This is very natural, considering his keenness of observation. But he has not yet sufficiently balanced this observation with an intellectual perspective of those characteristics which go to make the nation. We could more readily describe Mr. Fitch by saying that he was a typical New York dramatist, than a typical American dramatist; for the conventions running through his plays are those of a society which is common to New York City. Even in his scenic indications,

he preferred to appeal to the local sense of New Yorkers. His "Major André," played at the Savoy Theatre, was supposed to have taken place in an old colonial residence situated exactly on the spot occupied by the Savoy Theatre itself. His "Glad of It" had one act behind the scenes of the Savoy Theatre. His "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines" opened on the docks of the Cunard Steamship Company. The last two acts of "The Truth" were laid in a Harlem flat. "Girls" was filled with allusions to apartment life in New York, which only New Yorkers could fully appreciate.

This local sense is most likely to be encouraged in those dramatists who have gained experience through newspaper reporting. Mr. Thomas confesses that when he began to write for the stage, he mentally divided the country into various sections for his own purposes. He did this by centring his attention upon the social position women occupied in the North, South, East, and West, and he states the case thus: "In the South the unwritten law and the spotlessness of a woman's reputation are the first items, as they are the last. In the middle West they are not so punctilious; and in the far West, where the scarcity of the article raises its price, a woman's position is not prohibitive, if, after accepting a man's name and his protection, she runs straight and is true. In the North we have commenced to accept the English idea of compensation and consideration for services to the husband where a wife has been seduced." Whether Mr. Thomas actually did regard the country from this standpoint must be supported by careful examination of his plays, but we believe that this statement of his is more closely applicable to Mr. Fitch's own consideration of the sex problem. His plays were avowedly romantic, their psychology mostly commonplace and healthy. It was distinctively the psychology of the story-teller, and in instances was not only cleverly, but realistically, portrayed.



For instance, "The Girl with the Green Eyes" is a close, persistent analysis of jealousy.

Mr. Fitch attempted nearly every form of drama. His character studies, such as those typified by "Beau Brummel" — written in conjunction with Mr. Mansfield, — "Frédéric Lemaitre," and "His Grace de Grammont," reveal a delicacy and deftness which, although lacking in virility, constitute, none the less, miniatures of a notable order. He attempted war drama in his "Nathan Hale" and "Barbara Frietchie," but they may be described as war dramas with the war left out. He wrote straight comedies as well as farces; and in the realm of melodrama, such a piece as "The Woman in the Case" might be taken as a typical example.

The interest of Mr. Fitch usually centred upon the feminine side of his play. No writer for the stage had a keener sense of changing styles and foibles than he. Oftentimes his weakness lay in his too great dependence upon the novelty or familiarity of detail. He wrote so many pieces with these characteristics, that we were never startled by Mr. Fitch's inventive powers. Before going to see a new piece, we were almost sure of finding certain familiar features which belonged to no one else but him. Our curiosity was piqued, but so distinctly did we imagine that we knew the flavor of Mr. Fitch's atmosphere, that unless he gave us that flavor we left the theatre disappointed. We can say of "The Climbers," for example, that through the customary method Mr. Fitch employed, his public was willing to find amusement in the first act of a play which opened in a house of mourning a short while after the burial service had been performed. In "The Stubbornness of Geraldine," which in point of love interest is as typically German as "Her Great Match," the cleverness of representing the deck of one of our large ocean liners was legitimately entertaining.

But the Fitch flavor, which was so familiar to theatre-

goers, and which might almost be said to have become crystallized, created in the forty or fifty plays, which are to his credit, a level of cleverness above which very few of the pieces stand out. Nearly all of his plays bore a close relationship, one with the other. His heroines were mostly of the same romantic type, his heroes had the same polished daring. It is a mistaken idea that there are but few ways in drama of creating humor. We may no doubt reduce an analysis of humor to a certain number of elements, but the combinations of those elements are infinite. The fault with Mr. Fitch's humor rested in the fact that he was prone to use the same combinations over and over again. I would say of him that his grasp of the life and manners of New York, from earliest times, was more intimate than that possessed by any other dramatist or writer of the day. Because of this grasp, he was able to play with details, to contrast the past with the present, to create his humor by means of this balance of the past with the present. Take, for example, "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines." The references to Hoboken made by *Madame Trentoni* are put from the standpoint of those early times, rather than from the standpoint of to-day. Should one read the diaries of Tyrone Power, the grandfather of the present actor of that name, he would find the same characteristic innuendoes that sound humorous to us to-day, simply because they — while not wholly true of the Hoboken of the present — have, nevertheless, an element of truth in them.

Mr. Fitch created humor, likewise, by a method of comparing material advance. When *Madame Trentoni* comes down the gang-plank and meets the New York newspaper reporters, she is enthusiastic about the quickness of the trip over — something like fourteen days — and the reporters boast that in time to come they will even be able to make it in ten days. In view of the *Lusitania*, one cannot help

but smile! And this was the deftness of Mr. Fitch at full play. Take away from him those characteristics that were known as the Fitch qualities, and which might be termed superficial qualities if they were not truthful reproductions — however they might be superficial — and the remaining characteristics would indicate his limitations.

The comedy of manners is not only a legitimate form of dramatic art, but it is also one of the hardest forms to make vital. "The School for Scandal" has persisted from generation to generation, not because of its story, not because of its reflection of eighteenth century habits and customs, not because of its idea, which is hardly noteworthy, but because of its humanity underlying the superficial, a humanity which is eternal, whether in powder and patches, in hoop-skirts, or in the fashions of the present. There is a spontaneous flow of humor in this drama, dependent upon character, rather than upon situation or local reference. In fact, an over-abundance of local reference would take the sympathetic appeal away from a comedy after the age had passed.

Moreover, an over-emphasis of the local, even at close range, is detrimental to the understanding of a piece, outside that particular locality. Local characteristics, even national characteristics are only useful, in so far as they help to round out the character-value of the play. The Americanism in "The Lion and the Mouse" was its ruination in England. The Western allusions in George Ade's "The College Widow," which was presented in London, hastened its return home. It is to be remarked that Mr. Fitch successfully produced abroad only those plays of his that were more French in flavor than American. "The Cowboy and the Lady" was only fairly received. But "The Truth" has not only brought success to Marie Tempest; because of its foreign atmosphere, it has won its way throughout the Continent. Americans never quite realized how

much of a reputation Mr. Fitch had abroad. His last trip to Europe was a veritable sweep of the theatrical field. London had just received favorably "The Woman in the Case," and other managers were clamoring for his pieces, no matter how old they were. Sir Charles Wyndham was watching "The Blue Mouse," Belasco was seeking a contract with him, and every one was envious of the Shuberts who had secured the rights to "The City," that play which was to prove the last forceful flash of the maturing Mr. Fitch.

The list of plays I have compiled will indicate some of the activity of Mr. Fitch. It will show that in point of variety, if not in point of solidity, he was closely akin to Mr. Pinero, without that deep interest in the psychology of character which marks the English playwright. It might almost be said that the majority of his plays were but variations of the same theme. His technique was sometimes skilful, at other times it was hasty and crude; at its best it was more polished than vigorous. In the matter of dramatization, one might well imagine why Mr. Fitch was unsuccessful in turning Alfred Henry Lewis's "Wolfville Stories" into a Western play. But it is less evident, except in the inherent defects that beset the dramatization of any novel, why it was that "The House of Mirth," a distinctively New York story of the smart-set, written by Mrs. Wharton, should have missed the mark.

One final characteristic of Mr. Fitch needs to be noted, and it becomes distinctive if the reader is at all familiar with the personalities involved. Mr. Fitch nearly always wrote his plays with a definite actress in view. The consequence is that his characters almost invariably partook of the personality of their model. In "The Truth" and in "The Girl with the Green Eyes," the heroines are markedly like the late Clara Bloodgood. In "The Stubbornness of Geraldine," the heroine is closely related to Mary Manner-

ing. It is hard to find a better portrait of Miss Barrymore than in "Captain Jinks." "Her Own Way" is identified with Maxine Elliott, and "Barbara Frietchie" is synonymous with Julia Marlowe.

Thus, after noting the chief plays to Mr. Fitch's credit, we return to the original thesis, which dealt with the three underlying factors in drama. Our consideration has undoubtedly shown that what Mr. Fitch needed most was the accentuation of the element of idea, of *vital* idea. By the cultivating of this, he would perforce have been obliged to work less rapidly. But Mr. Fitch was never careless, even in his rapidity. Quick workmanship was part of his nature; he was quick to observe and quick to appreciate. His humor was ever present, and he dramatized everything that came within his vision. To his sense of character, his sense of situation, and his sense of dialogue, Mr. Fitch added a fourth sense distinctively his own — that of New York locality. His position in American drama is one which has afforded a large amount of healthy enjoyment; and to have done this is to have done a great deal. In the matter of construction, his plays that have been published will serve the dramatic student as excellent examples of external stagecraft. They will illustrate for him in what manner the observation of familiar detail may be made use of, theatrically; they will illustrate in what way the interest of an audience may be held through an ordinary, though none the less picturesque, story.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following references will prove suggestive: *Book Buyer*, 17:118 (E. F. Coward); *Book Buyer*, 16:323 (E. A. Dithmar); *Critic*, 38:225 (J. R. Towse).

"Barbara Frietchie": *Literature*, 5:411; *Pub. Opin.*, 27:563; *Harp. W.*, 43:1096 (J. Corbin); *Lit. W.*, 30:361 (J. D. Barry); *B'kman*, 10:317 (N. Hapgood); *Critic*, 35:1143 (J. R. Towse).

"Cowboy and the Lady": *Athenæum*, '99, 1:731; *Sat. Rev.*, 87:718 (M. Beerbohm).

Clyde Fitch has been dead over a year (1911). Had he lived much beyond forty-five, we should have seen a certain transformation in his technique, and a more pronounced purpose in his plots; for he was becoming deeply conscious of the fundamental truths of life, and he was eager to put strength into his dialogue in order to offset the delicacy and feminine flashes which the public always considered purely Fitchian. "The City" was his first, as it proved to be his last, effort in that direction.

Mr. Fitch often claimed that he was always measured in the public press by stereotyped phrases which clung to him because his manner was ever the same. He deplored the fact that the newspapers failed to give him credit for his close study of character, such as one finds in "The Girl with the Green Eyes" and in "The Truth." Only after he was dead did the critics begin to realize the incommunicable flavor permeating his dramas. This flavor came partly from a close understanding of New York life, whether of the past or of the present — in "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines" or in "Girls." But it was in larger share the flavor of personality. No degree of profundity could ever have limited Clyde Fitch's enthusiasm while writing or rehearsing; he was quick in mind and in execution, and sometimes his very deftness and easy brilliancy were his undoing. He realized this; he tried his best to push back the numberless contracts and offers which claimed his time.

He took his success as naively as a boy, but he was planning to place more attention upon the message than he had

"Head of the Family": *Il. Am.*, 24:492; *Harp. W.*, 42:1273 (J. Corbin).

"Moth and the Flame": *Critic*, n. s., 29:271.

"Nathan Hale": *Harp. W.*, 43:35; *B'kman*, 8:528 (N. Hapgood); *Critic*, 34:142; *Harp. W.*, 43:213 (J. Corbin).

heretofore done. This may later have handicapped him, for passages of an ethical nature in "A Happy Marriage" retarded the action of the piece.

After all, the sum total of his work cannot be rejected from the body of dramatic literature; his very style is distinctive and is a measure of the man's outlook upon life. He told his story simply, directly, tenderly and humorously. Only when he resorted to theatrical trickery did his work become uneven; and this unevenness accentuated the rich humanity and the kindly observation of his normal plays. One cannot call "The Stubbornness of Geraldine" a great drama, but it has a certain lively charm that no other playwright seems able to embody in a play. The temptation is to call such sentiment commonplace. "Granny" was full of it; so was "The Girl Who Has Everything." Seeing these plays in succession, the theatre-goer would criticise their apparent resemblance. But an analysis would inevitably lead to the conclusion that the resemblance lay in the same personality behind them, and not in any monotony of detail.

Clyde Fitch was extravagant in his invention; he was careless in throwing a whole problem away within the limits of a line of dialogue. Such extravagance was indicative of his natural interest in all things bearing on human relationships. He brought the whole of life within the compass of home, and he gained his audiences by a seeming comradeship which made them feel that his windows overlooked the very housetops with which they themselves were familiar. He knew how to use the reporter's method; one could see this in "The Woman in the Case," and in "The City." But his usual method was literary, not journalistic; it was narrative in direct fashion, and not impressionistic. And because he knew his New York so well, he could afford to throw out those sparks of wit and humor which tran-

scend a town, and are common to all provincial attitudes toward life. If he was cynical, it was friendly banter; he was never bitter. Yet looking deeper into the printed page of his published plays, it is apparent that he had had quite enough of society at the time of his death; that the city had made such demands upon his physical strength as to turn his desire toward the quietness of country life. There, he would have started the larger work of a different kind from that characterizing his long list of popular plays. Whether he would have succeeded as well is a matter for futile speculation.

He has been dead over a year, and he is missed; there is no one to take his place. A remark was once made by Thomas A. Edison to the effect that he hoped some day to have the time at his disposal for making a real contribution to science. But it is not easy to believe that anything he may do will ever surpass his actual genius in hitching his wagon to a star; in other words, in attaching a high imagination to practical conditions. So was it with Clyde Fitch. His personality is part of the work he did, and New York's duty is clearly defined, for he is in a sense the city's playwright. America has not yet understood what honor is due to such literary achievement. Its immediate reward was in the crowds that constituted a Fitch following for some fifty plays, mostly popular in their long "runs." Still, there is more to do, for now that he is dead, we know that something rare is taken from the theatre — something with a distinct literary value — light, no doubt, airy, and sometimes frothy, but none the less life with which we are all familiar.

There is nothing old-fashioned in Clyde Fitch's attitude or in his workmanship; they will scarcely become out-of-date for many a decade. There are other artists much stronger, with theories of technique much more original. But



Clyde Fitch's originality is to be found in his close connection with the material he used. His audiences were given much more of himself than they ever knew. And that is why they will never find any other plays quite like his.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCERNING MELODRAMA

THE use of the term *melodrama* has undergone many changes, and it is a question whether at the present moment it is not being subjected to another modification or crucial shifting of the point of view. Such a bastard form of art has it been regarded by the majority of theatre-goers, that one has lost sight of its origin in the sixteenth century, and of the romantic stock from which it sprang. The term *melodrama* or *melodramatic*, as applied to a play, is popularly looked upon as a sign of condemnation, yet if we consider the essential ingredients for a moment, we will see that the melodrama itself is not the thing to be condemned, but rather the special form in which it is expressed.

The historical side of the subject has received scant attention from the scholar. While in general we are told that Ottavio Rinuccini toward the end of the sixteenth century invented the term *melodrama*, from the Greek words meaning *melody* and *action*, and while we are given to understand that in its application it related entirely to opera, Jean Jacques Rousseau having written his "Pygmalion" for instrumental music; still a scholar has yet to unravel its development from the intricacies of the romantic period, which swept through Italy and France and thence to England. It is hardly conceivable that the music written by Beethoven for "Egmont," or by Massenet for "Phèdre," should be classed in the same *genre* as "Nellie, the Beautiful

Cloak Model" or "Convict 999;"<sup>1</sup> yet such is the case, and from such a loose application of the term there has arisen a misunderstanding as to the true elements in melodrama.

Analyzing the relation between music and drama, we note the point from which melodrama might be said to start. Always the highest moments in an opera, the most brilliant moments, are those which involve the characteristic elements of a glaring play. The characters sing longest when they are dying, they boast loudest in the most pronounced arias of the score; their actions are broad and lack subtlety, a subtlety which is dependent more upon the music than upon the play. Possibly it is because the musician has instinctively realized that the moments of greatest music are the moments of greatest human suffering; and undoubtedly the melodramatist of to-day has grasped this fact, and is working it for all it is worth. Take away from our operas the orchestration, and the plots will be little more than out and out melodrama.

The student of the theatre will some day, in dealing with this subject of melodrama, be forced to disentangle its beginnings from the most heightened creations of the romantic period. He will not disdain to connect this *genre* of play-writing with that struggle which went on between the classic spirit and the romantic spirit, and which finally resulted in the victory of the latter, when Victor Hugo, in 1830, published "Hernani." It was the same struggle which had commenced in France when the Academicians, Boileau and Charles Perrault, became so deeply involved in a quarrel resulting in petty innuendoes and personal thrusts.

Practically the same result was accomplished in England

<sup>1</sup> The methods of advertising melodrama are unique. When "Convict 999" was first produced, three men in stripes, and chained together, tramped the streets of New York. The managers of "Tony, the Bootblack" sent three boys through certain sections of the city, giving free shines to all holders of tickets for "the show."

as Dutton Cook claims was effected in France. For, to quote the latter: "Schlegel, writing early in the century, notes that dramatic poetry in Paris possessed a certain point of contact with the police, and that the restrictions placed upon the leading theatres banished to the minor stages all new and mixed attempts at histrionic entertainment."

The history of melodrama in England began in 1802, when Holcroft adapted a French manuscript which he called "A Tale of Mystery." And at this early period it is interesting to note the popular conception of the origin of the term *melodrama*, as conceived by the son of Harris, the manager of Covent Garden. He wrote to Frederick Reynolds from Paris regarding the peculiar type of plays which were classed under a name derived from the two words *mêler* and *drame*.<sup>1</sup>

Up to the time of the advent of the Dion Boucicault sensationalism, for he may be regarded as one of the first to combine the excess of situation with the excess of stage mechanism, melodrama might be said to have become almost conventional in its adherence to a species of foreign brigand literature. There was not very much desire to accentuate the events of everyday life, but, adhering to the stereotyped romantic passions and situations of the Radcliffe school of novels, the melodramatist of this earlier period wrote more in the tone of the opera librettist than of the dramatist. The history of melodrama in this country, to within recent years, is practically the same as that of England, and the two may be said to have been dependent upon French sources. In the period of 1860, America was inundated with a type of "dime novel" story, which spread from ocean to ocean, affecting literature for growing boys, and likewise affording a new impetus to melodrama. For about this time,

<sup>1</sup> Gr. *melos*, song, + *drama*(t-), < *draō*, perform.



*Photo. by Sarony*

DION BOUCICAULT



as we have said before, Mr. Belasco was enjoying such a glaring piece as "The Idiot Boy of the Rocky Mountains;" and when he reached the East, he found that Mr. Daly had made a success with a melodrama of that section, entitled "Under the Gaslight." The type of play such as "The Two Orphans," which is in its essentials nothing but a melodrama, could not long survive the reaction which in drama was now to take place. There is no doubt that, even as Pinero and Jones were to break from Robertson and Taylor, and realism was to usurp the boards, so melodrama would likewise be affected by this very realism. The ingredients have always been the same, but the objective point of view was obliged to undergo material alteration with the change of conditions. The present-day melodrama, which is better named sensational drama, has been materially affected by those forces which have been detected behind yellow journalism.

Let us get clearly in mind the characteristics marking melodrama. The dominant feature is situation; the broadest results of the very broadest and most elemental emotions. Mr. Walkley has expressed it by saying that there are two sides of a criminal, the outside and the inside, melodrama usually dealing with the former, whereas the novelist would search for the conditions resulting in the existence of the criminal. These two sides are in substance the distinctive difference between present-day melodrama and present-day fiction.

The old English and French miracle plays had in them all the essentials of this glaring stage type. The manner in which the miracle of "St. Nicholas and the Thieves" was presented, the careful delineation of *Hellmouth*, with the Devil and his demons rushing up and down the aisles of the church, appealed to the same instincts in the mass of mediæval people, that the broad glorification of good and the met-

ing of punishment do to the people of to-day. Fitzball, who was considered one of the most productive melodramatists of the early nineteenth century in England, heard Sheridan Knowles proclaim that he considered "Macbeth" one of the finest melodramas he had ever seen; and there is undoubted truth in what he said. Perhaps he asserted this as a defense of his own play, "The Hunchback" — which itself belongs to this class of drama. But even at that early day the term had been so misused and the species had so broadened, freed from the narrow restrictions of the patent theatres of London, that Douglas Jerrold, in his report before the Parliamentary Commission of 1832, appointed to examine into the status of the London theatres, inadvertently invented a new term, which is familiar to us to-day as the *legitimate* drama, and which he pitted against this other form. Not only did he deplore the over-accentuation of the physical result to the detriment of the mental cause in melodrama, but Macready likewise regarded the sensational with such disfavor that his contracts stipulated he should be given no part partaking of a melodramatic character.

Up to this time melodrama, which is not only a legitimate type, but also a dominant characteristic of our American life, has run wild. The writer of melodrama has misinterpreted his license, and the lovers of the melodramatic are being sated with a succession of situations and a minimum of plot. One of the most successful playwrights of this type of piece is Owen Davis, the author of "The Confessions of a Wife" — which is distinctive from his other plays by the fact that it calls for no "guns," to use a professional term, — "Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model" and "Convict 999." He has declared that a certain reaction is about to take place in this indiscriminate use of situation for situation's sake; that his audiences are now beginning to see the improbability of so many hairbreadth escapes occurring in



the life of any human being within the three hours' traffic of the stage. The public libraries are improving the taste of the public. So that from excess we are forced to return to consistency.

Only a hairline separates the emotion of Broadway from that of the Bowery. Mr. Gillette's "Sherlock Holmes" was nothing more than a "thriller," acted with a certain refinement and a certain reserve; which characteristics are usually avoided by the manager of melodrama. Not only has the sensational play taken unto itself a certain formula by which virtue and villainy are expressed, but it likewise requires a diction which is excessive in its accentuation.

When all is told, therefore, the difference between the legitimate theatre and melodrama lies in this matter of accentuation. Bartley Campbell's "My Partner," Lester Wallack's "Rosedale," "The White Heather," Jones's "The Silver King," "The Ticket-of-Leave Man," C. M. S. McLellan's "Leah Kleschna," and "The Great Ruby" are accounted melodramas of the old school, containing all the distorted actions and passions of the present type, but differing from the present type, inasmuch as the stories were consistent and the characterizations human. Despite the sensationalism in Dion Boucicault, the genial Irish atmosphere was dominant, and the heart interest was so romantic as to cover the daring ventures with the gloss of possibility. Now, however, such writers of melodrama as Owen Davis and Theodore Kremer have discarded the intermediate development between the glaring situations, and are dealing wholly with the situations themselves, one after the other, irrespective of their possibility in life, and with the sole intention of deadening the logical sense of the spectator with sensationalism.

Mr. Davis is a Harvard graduate, and was drawn into writing such plays as "Tony, the Bootblack" and "Nellie,

the Beautiful Cloak Model" by his association with "The Great Ruby" company. He thought he could write just as clever a story for the stage, and so he began then and there, acting meanwhile, until he gained a footing as one of the principal manufacturers of the sensational play. He recognized the legitimate side of melodrama, he deplored the piling up of catastrophe upon catastrophe, he saw the bathos in the formula which states that the play ends only when every possible calamity has been exhausted. Mr. Davis was what one might call a student of his particular field. He understood his public, which in matter of taste is of the Laura Jean Libbey class. He knew wherein this public was credulous,—the point of appeal in its sentimental make-up. His audiences would not countenance the regeneration of a stage bad man; they must have the victory of virtue and the happy ending; the good must be rewarded suddenly, the bad must be punished lingeringly.

Mr. Davis has now deserted the realm of the sensational for that of the legitimate, but in doing so he has not forgotten the measure of that public to which he used to make appeal. In an interview, he has epitomized the characteristics of melodrama in this manner:

"On Third Avenue the treatment is different. Instead of avoiding the obvious you must insist upon it first, last and all the time. You must move up the ascending scale of emotions with directness. Your hero must be labeled at his first entrance. Nothing must be left to inference. It is almost indispensable that he knock down the villain in the first two minutes following his entrance. In the same easy way your comedian must get a laugh as he comes on. Instead of having your heroine pursued by some abstract thing such as fate, you must have her pursued by a tangible villain bent upon cutting her throat. You must pile catastrophe upon catastrophe. By the time the hero

throws his protecting arms around her in the last act, she must have narrowly escaped scalping by Indians, been almost drowned in a mill-race, missed death in a train wreck, and been shot at and stabbed by the villain, to say nothing of having passed unscathed through several conflagrations, an earthquake or two, a mine cave-in, or a magazine explosion. The play only ends when you have exhausted every possible calamity, but it ends happily; it *must* end happily. And the hero must remain the hero, and the villain must die as black as when he first came on. I know, because I have tried. The public has no faith in the regeneration of the stage bad man. He is there as the symbol of everything that's bad, and by the fourth act he has committed every crime possible. The audience does n't want him to repent and get away free. He must be killed lingeringly, if possible. Right must triumph and wrong must be punished. That is one of the fundamental principles of the so-called cheap drama.

"In that particular the cheap drama is a power for good and a moralizing force of no little value. Our heroics are mock heroics, perhaps, but they have a salutary effect nevertheless. The lowly laborer who lives a life of squalor in the back room of a tenement, when he hears the hero declare that he would rather die than steal, may come to think that, after all, this is the sort of morality that suits him too.

"Speaking only of my own plays, I dare say that I have addressed each season an audience numbering upward of seven million people. I have had eighteen plays on the road at a time, and about ninety in stock. In every one of my pieces there is some wholesome truth, some good moral precept advanced, and yet almost invariably the attitude maintained by the press toward these plays is one of gentle derision. Serious criticism of them is never attempted. The one reason why newspaper men are sent to cover them is to

poke fun at them the next day. They furnish the basis for funny stories, nothing else. Personally, I don't see any fairness in this. Certain papers which I need not mention make special effort to catch the proletariat by writing down their editorials to the mental level and understanding of the illiterate, prosaic, unlettered, uncultured classes, and then turn right about to another column and assume the superior and high-art tone in discussing the plays which these same people go to see."

And should we ask Mr. Davis to outline the formula for us succinctly, he would say that his audiences never take things for granted. You must emphasize for them that a certain event is going to happen, that it is happening, and that it has happened; three times each point must be driven home. Humanity being the keynote, the ten- and twenty- and thirty-cent theatre-goer must have action laid on in large sweeps. The emotions must not be subtle; they must ascend toward the climax, not in flowing consistency, but with intermittent thumps. The formula exacts that the heroine must be as young and fresh after twenty hairbreadth escapes as though she were attending a garden party. Yet from the technical side, Mr. Davis's ingenuity is striking. He wrote the dialogue for and planned the staging of "The Siege of Port Arthur" for the Hippodrome, and certain striking elements therein he transferred to his own melodrama, "Convict 999."<sup>1</sup> He has written so many melodramas of the conventional type, he has studied the situation so thoroughly, that he is able to tell exactly in what respects the next change in melodrama will be revealed. Although his "Gambler of the West," his "Broadway after Dark," his "Chinatown

<sup>1</sup> Other plays by Mr. Davis are: "On Trial for his Life," "The Crooked Path," "The Prince of Spendthrifts," "The Millionaire and the Circus Rider," "Jack Sheppard, the Bandit King," and "The King and Queen of Gamblers."

Charlie," and his "Creole Slave's Revenge" are sure of a hearing from his particular following, he recognizes that this following is becoming sated, that their acceptance is being turned into incredulity, that they are being educated away from the old order and nearer the legitimate realm of melodrama.

In this respect, it may be noted that A. H. Woods, one of the largest managers of melodrama in America, is himself being involved in this change. For while he has been the means of encouraging the thriller of the present, he likewise, as a manager, has been drawn nearer to the legitimate drama; and a reaction is likewise occurring in his own attitude toward this particular theatre which has made him a fortune. Whereas heretofore he would have discountenanced any attempt on the part of Owen Davis or Theodore Kremer, of John Oliver or of the other countless writers of melodrama to use any subtle methods in depicting emotion, in treating consistent sequence of cause and effect, he is now himself becoming critical of the sensationalism of the past. Just so soon as Mr. Woods goes over the line which separates the melodramatic syndicate from the theatrical trust, just so soon will the new departure in melodrama occur.<sup>1</sup> Then will Mr. Davis be able to put into practice his greatest hopes, and, provided his sense of proportion is not atrophied, he will be able to satisfy his own ambitions.

Mr. Theodore Kremer likewise shows the same dissatisfaction over being forced to produce such dramas as "Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl," "Fast Life in New York," "The Fatal Wedding," and "The King of Bigamists." He outlines the melodramatic formula in this way: "My audiences are all from Missouri; they want to be shown; unless you show them first they will not believe. In the play now being

<sup>1</sup> Since this writing, Mr. Woods has gone over the line in "The Girl and the Taxi," a piece full of dull vulgarity.

acted by Miss Ethel Barrymore ['Her Sister'], it is made clear during the conversation that the fortune-teller and the young man to whom she is engaged first met in a train. Now it is all right for the Broadway audiences to hear that the two met in a train, but the Eighth Avenue audiences have to be shown the train and the meeting. Instead of beginning the acquaintance by having him hand her a paper, he would — to please my theatre goers — have to fling the paper in her face. She would be insulted and address him, 'Sir!' Then he would apologize, the acquaintance would begin, and it could then ripen into love, but not before. And in the first act of the play the fortune-teller would have to be shot on to the stage out of a trap-door."

Mr. Kremer was once regarded as the Clyde Fitch of melodrama, even as Owen Davis usurped the title of Augustus Thomas; and should one examine the manuscripts of each, this distinction might be readily seen, for Mr. Davis's sensationalism is fraught with the vigor of the masculine, whereas Mr. Kremer usually deals with the feminine.<sup>1</sup> Yet despite this sex view-point, their plays are worked absolutely upon the same lines; their heroes, their heroines, their villains, their inconsistencies, their colloquial humor, their virtues which obtrude to such a degree as to lack virtue, their seriousness which is so pronounced as to be humorous, are all of the same color. They write their plays according to a formula decided upon between themselves and their manager. The bill-board posters are drawn a long while before pen is even put to paper. The trap-doors, the bridges which are to be blown up, the walls which are to be scaled, the instruments of torture for the persecuted heroines, the

<sup>1</sup> Other writers of melodrama are John Oliver, Hal Reid, Lem B. Parker, William L. Roberts, Joseph B. Totten, Joseph Le Brandt, and Langdon McCormack. Al Woods is taken as the typical producer of melodramas; there were others.

freight elevators which are to crush out the lives of deserving characters, the elevated trains which are to rush upon the prostrate forms of gagged and insensible girls, — all these melodramatic accessories are determined upon before the manuscript takes shape. In fact, there is little shaping done after the situations are decided upon. The only thing left for the dramatist is to fill up the gaps with conversations which lead, however irrelevantly, to the situations themselves. Herein are to be found those elements of melodrama which are finally to be the cause of its own undoing. For the masses are being better educated, are — because of the general interest in drama — coming under influences which raise their standards of living and soften their ideals. One cannot fool the public all the time at the theatre, even though it be on Eighth Avenue or on the Bowery. They have been fooled once, twice, thrice; and soon they will reach the point where the manager of melodrama will in turn find himself fooled. That is the hope of the legitimate melodrama. Besides which, those audiences once sated with such acting now find their tastes gratified by the moving picture which *has* to accentuate action in order to be seen.

It is hard to analyze any of the plays representing this peculiar type. The newspaper accidents, murders, intrigues, the electrical and mechanical marvels of the age, are all used. There is the conventional drunkard who maltreats the conventional cripple; there is the one character from whom all humor flows, a convention which marks the Yiddish stage as well. The hero, in the course of his progress along the path of love, disguises himself a thousand and one times; and the grand *finale* usually comes with the arrival of a man-of-war, or the rushing on of soldiers. You cannot outline the plot; you can only enumerate the situations.

It is said that yellow journalism is dependent not so much upon the manner in which a leading article is written, as on

the style in which the type is set and the manner in which the pictures are drawn.

This perhaps might likewise be claimed for melodrama. Once win a bad name, and it is hard to escape it. In Mr. Belasco's "The Girl of the Golden West" the wounded hero is hidden by the girl from the pursuing *Sheriff*, and from where he lies in the rafters of the room, blood drips upon the floor beneath. Had Mr. Kremer been the author of this piece, one would have smiled at it. But the two-dollar audiences accepted it because it was Mr. Belasco. However, the difference between "The Girl of the Golden West," softened by some attempt at subdued acting, and "The Girl of the Golden West" as it might have been given on the Bowery or Eighth Avenue, would lie wholly in the matter of accentuation.

Undoubtedly the melodrama of to-day differs from the melodrama of yesterday; and that it has fallen into disfavor is due solely to the fact that its essential characteristics have been misused. This does not mean that the characteristics, *per se*, are not healthy and dramatic. The melodrama of to-morrow will show an increased consistency on the part of the dramatist, and will indicate a corresponding improvement in the tastes of those audiences which are now stigmatized as a class, but which differ essentially from the legitimate audiences only in the fact that one pays twenty-five cents for a seat while the other pays two dollars.

#### NOTE

On the subject of melodrama, the reader is referred to the following:

"Old Melodrama." H. D. Baker. *Belgra.*, 50:331-39, 1883.

"Possibilities of Melodrama." *Spec.*, 56:1691.

"Melodrama." *All the Year*, 41:436.

"Melodrama." See Price's "Technique of the Drama."

"Melodrama." Harry James Smith. *Atlantic*, March, 1907.



"Melodrama." *Diccionario Enciclopedico Hispano-Americano de Literatura, Ciencias y Artes.*

"The Taint of Melodrama and some Recent Books." F. T. Cooper. *Bookman*, 22:630-35, Feb., 1906.

"Melodrama." Dutton Cook. "On the Stage," 2:190.

"Melodrama." A. B. Walkley. "Playhouse," 170.

"Melodrama." *International*. Dodd, Mead.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE KINETOSCOPIC THEATRE

#### I

THE kinetoscopic theatre is at the parting of the ways. The crucial point has arrived when it shall either be a great success or an absolute failure. In New York alone, people have been flocking through the gaudy, blatant entrances at the rate of two hundred thousand a week. In eighteen minutes they have been given a production of "Romeo and Juliet" or of "Othello" or of "Francesca da Rimini," and they have gone out, only to be superseded by a crowd as big and just as eager. The manager of the mechanical "show" measures his profit by the rapidity with which he turns out one audience and gathers in another.

The kinetoscopic theatre, however, is a factor to be reckoned with. It may be made a source of good or a source of evil. It has built up a business which has its problems similar to those confronting the theatre managers. It requires for its success an intelligent handling on the part of the manufacturer of the pictures, of the middleman, and of the showman. Unfortunately, with the rapid increase of the business, this careful thought is lacking. Where a manufacturing firm turns out nearly two hundred and eighty thousand feet of film a day, it is natural that much of the material should be of inferior quality. There is ample room for the kinetoscopic dramatist.

The kinetoscopic theatre audience speaks in terms of

minutes and miles. When it goes to see "Othello," it expects to grasp the story in seventeen minutes. The actors who are employed to perform a play before the camera interpret their rôles in terms of large gestures, of abnormal facial expression, and of excessive passion. Not so very long ago a stock company in New England was employed by one of the kinetoscopic companies to play for them the first act of Belasco's version of "Zaza." Ordinarily, this takes from forty-five to fifty minutes for actual performance, but the company ran through all the "business" in fifteen minutes. This might be called strenuous acting in a mechanical age. Instead of having to pay actors for performing "Romeo and Juliet," the manager of the nickelodeon has to pay for the use of his films by the week, being charged according to the number of feet used in telling the story. For example, the film of Boker's "Francesca da Rimini," embracing seven scenes, has a length of 990 feet, "Romeo and Juliet" 915 feet, and "Macbeth" 835 feet. A time will come, therefore, when drama for the kinetoscope audiences will literally be measured by the mile.

The five- and ten-cent theatres sell their tickets as the drug stores dispose of their soda checks, in long rolls. Unfortunately for the business, there are many sections of every large city where two or three such theatres are found in one block, following the example of the saloon. Competition is healthy, but such wildcat speculation is ruinous to the small manager. He thinks that to have his machine and to rent his films are sufficient. He does not calculate upon whether or not the location is good; he does not plan how to manage his audiences; he believes — judging by the profits that others have made — that the show will run itself, whereas it is subject to the same rules as other businesses. The average exhibitor of moving-pictures must either show brains — which he is not doing — or else go

under. Though his outfit may be mechanical, his audience is not; the people have definite tastes regarding what they see, and the exhibitor, the manufacturer, and the renter must watch this public in order to sound its varying desires.

It is only a question of time before the nickelodeon is improved: either the wildcat manager will be forced out of business, or he will have to conform to better methods. A failure to-day in the moving-picture business means that the man who owns the business has no brains, and does not know the people of the locality in which he works. For, after all, the success of the nickelodeon represents so much human response.

Usually, the frequenters of these cheap places are those who cannot afford more expensive pleasures; those who gather around the white tin entrances with their glaring posters are most likely children who cannot even afford five-cent luxuries. These waifs are kept at bay by a man flourishing a cane. Sometimes, when business is slack, children are invited in to help keep up appearances.

There is much to be said for and against the moving-picture. Judiciously used, it could be educational, but at best it is mechanical, it lacks individuality; this must be kept in mind. Its usefulness has received widespread recognition. The government at Washington has its film department; the moving-picture serves as record for military manœuvres and naval displays. A catalogue records the title for a film twenty-seven feet long: "A German Torpedo Flotilla in Action," taken by special command of Kaiser Wilhelm. In New York, the Museum of Natural History is experimenting with the cinematograph, picturing the flight of birds, the habitat of bears.

The moving-picture as an amusement lacks the human element, yet the response it creates is human. It can never be art; it can only be a representation of art, and as such

it must be directed. The Victor talking machines have ground forth the speeches of Taft and of Bryan; the biograph has projected the motion of the National Conventions. Bring the phonograph and the biograph together, and still the live element is absent. For this reason it is one of the greatest enemies to the theatre, which is a live institution, presenting plays in human fashion.

At best the nickelodeon audiences are casual groups: they are not held together by any effective bond of common interest or large idea. Their drama is told in seeable action, and there is little or no time spent on other than elemental idea or sentiment. That is a danger which only an educational grip of the situation could stop. But the boys and girls of the tenements, their mothers and fathers, go of an evening because the diversion is stimulating without effort, even though there is a strain upon the eyes.

The manufacturer of mechanical music, of mechanical drama, has an ethical responsibility. It lies between points admirably indicated by two scenes which are uppermost in my mind. One Sunday morning, in the Blue Ridge Mountains, overlooking the Shenandoah Valley, I visited a cabin perched above a forest of trees; grandmother, grandfather, mother and father, son and daughter, and a string of children sat grouped around a phonograph, listening to some countryman telling his comical city experiences. Then the father, in flannel shirt and heavy boots, his lined and roughened face aglow with pleasure, announced that a church choir would sing to them. Despite the grating sound, these simple folk sat awed by the beauty of the quartette. The manufacturers measure popular taste by the music halls, and, unfortunately, not by the native temperament.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In passing, it is well to note that the phonograph is now being used to record the negro folk-songs and the tribal chants of Indians.

The other picture is on Avenue C, in New York, in a crowded block, where people must elbow their way, where there is never quiet, and never a blade of grass. The Herr Professor in charge of one of these houses would have nature scenes brought from the topmost mountain, from the innermost depth of the American forest, to offset the cramping city view of tenement upon tenement. Such is the possibility, yet such is not the accomplishment, except in this one instance. The moving-picture business needs intelligent guiding; that is its one hope. Otherwise, it becomes a menace, socially, morally, and ethically. What is now urgent is to prevent the vitiating effect of undesirable performances. The nickelodeon without an idea behind it is a menace to the neighborhood. The idea must be inserted, for there is no doubt that the moving-picture has come to stay. The visual sense must be supplemented by a mental stimulus. Intellectually, the five-cent audience is worthy of a higher form of amusement than the moving-picture show can supply. It is the personality of its manager, with his ideas and his ideals, that raises the business to a different plane. And the Herr Professor, with his educational aspirations and his knowledge of what the people like, found that being a conscientious nickelodeon manager brought profit in more ways than one.

It must be borne in mind that the exhibitor has to deal with the manufacturer through a middleman. There is a film trust, just as there is a theatrical trust, and the exhibitor is not allowed to rent directly from the manufacturers. There are two dangers consequent upon this arrangement. The exhibitor often has no choice but to take what the renter gives him. If he receives a good subject one day, he has to expect a poor, a sensational, a common subject the next. This would be obviated, provided the exhibitor could select his films for each show directly from

the manufacturer. To judge by investigations, it will be found that the exhibitor has not yet discovered that he is not obliged to take what he does not wish. The trust situation, as it confronts the kinetoscope business, is a struggle carried on between several organized manufacturers on the one hand and a number of independent firms on the other. The exhibitor, therefore, has reached that stage when he grabs what he can get. A censorship bureau, begun in New York, but of wide scope, now gives better advantages to the small exhibitor, inasmuch as by its actions it is weeding out that which will be harmful, and demanding higher grade films.

## II

The nickelodeon theatre has its press-agent, and this press agent has his particular vocabulary, filled with descriptive adjectives that express motion. *The Moving Picture World*, devoted to the interests of animated photographs, quotes a sample of such literature: "To hear the voice, to catch every sound and intonation of every word, and see the people in life size moving before your eyes, and yet realise there is not a single person there — it seems like some phantom of the brain, an hallucination, and one is almost tempted to rush to the stage and grapple with the ghostly actors as one is moved to cry out in the vividness of a dream."

After a performance is completed, the audience is supposed to pass out. In some places the management delicately reminds them of this fact by repeating one or two of the pictures previously seen. In other places, however, such a method is entirely too subtle, and so an official, known as "the chaser," proceeds down the middle aisle doing his work. Most of the theatres are managed in practically the same way. Should you visit several of them you would find a certain monotony, which is one of the insurmountable facts about

moving-pictures — the monotony of mechanical interpretation.

But the moving-picture has in many respects come to stay. The newspaper reporter, for instance, has a rival, since it has now become generally recognized that wherever an event of moment is taking place, side by side with the newspaper man may generally be found the moving-picture man with his outfit. I have been told that in England such a phrase as "the animated newspaper" has been coined. King Edward VII. once opened an exhibition at South Kensington; two hours and a half after the ceremony, a matinee audience twelve miles away was witnessing the occurrence by means of the kinetoscope. The reporter speaks of his Sunday feature in the newspaper. In the same sense the moving-picture man is accomplishing similar results by his films, which show the surrender of Port Arthur, the riots in St. Petersburg — led by Father Capon — and the assassination of the Grand Duke Sergius.

Already the operators of the kinetoscope have formed themselves into an organization known as "Local No. 23 of the Theatrical, Electrical, Calcium Picture and Projecting Machine Operators' Union of New York." Everywhere in this moving-picture business, there seems to be organization, but there are many entering the field who have no idea as to how the work should be run.

Sometimes when the films are particularly fine, the manager raises his price from five to ten cents, just as the theatre manager raises his price when Bernhardt comes to this country. On the New York East Side during Easter Week the whole Passion of Christ was given in moving-pictures. The performance took more than an hour and was accompanied by a lecture outlining the chief incidents. Altogether the films, divided into four parts, amounted to three thousand, one hundred and fourteen feet in length. Despite the fact



that this nickelodeon theatre was situated in the Jewish quarter, the manager told me that during the week he exhibited the film, his business had been larger than ever before.

I have used the phrase "exhibited the film." This means that, according to the way in which the business is managed, the films travel from point to point, just as a stock company would go from theatre to theatre. A film has its "route," just as a traveling company has its "route," and I have been told by many operators: "My 'Way Down East' film, or my 'Ben-Hur' film arrives to-morrow evening." The American dramatists have sought to protect themselves through a revision of the copyright law, and a suit once pended over the kinetoscope use of "Ben-Hur." When one considers that we are applying human terms to the mechanical facts, the humor of the situation is very striking.

In Paris, the Pathé Frères — realizing the essential right of the French dramatist to his own property — have done the next best thing; they have arranged with members of the Society of French Dramatists and Authors to write special plays for use solely by the kinetoscope. If the talking-machines may preserve the voices of our opera singers, why may not the kinetoscope preserve the acting of our actors? For, to carry the educational feature one step further, the time may not be far off when our dramatic schools will be instructed by Mme. Bernhardt and Coquelin from the moving-picture screen.

Unfortunately, in our rush to introduce the moving-pictures into this country — a rush that is creating a very thoughtless competition in the trade — our manufacturers are forgetting the ethics of the business. They have not as yet compromised in the French manner with the American dramatist, though they will be forced later on to do so. But they have been taking without permission the popular successes of the moment, and turning them by the whole-

sale into kinetoscopic shows. That is why, in its last session, the Copyright Committee called before it many representatives of the American Dramatists' Club, especially those who were suffering by reason of the kinetoscopic performances of their plays. William A. Brady gave his evidence as to "Way Down East": "My play," so he said, "is now being printed on films of from a hundred to two hundred copies a week, by a company which is a member of this [moving-picture] Trust in Chicago; and yesterday one of my companies, composed of thirty-five people — men and women — was forced off the road and sent back to New York. They never can play again, because in nearly every one-night stand in this country, 'Way Down East' is being presented on every street corner, presented from a stolen manuscript by a man who went into one of our theatres and took down a copy of our play, and sold it to this picture firm which is now destroying my property." At the same committee meeting, Charles Klein spoke of "The Music Master" which had been presented at a nickelodeon house on Fourteenth Street. This competition with his own play hurt the gallery receipts at the Academy of Music; and such a condition is ruination in many instances to the manager, since the profits of a theatre are almost always to be found in the gallery.

During the course of this conference between legislators and theatrical people, it was brought out that contracts had been made in France by moving-picture manufacturers, with Edmond Rostand, Henri Lavedan, and Alfred Capus, for the writing of special plays, the former to do three fairy dramas, of which the first will be "The Sleeping Beauty," while Lavedan will write an historical drama, dealing with the Duc de Guise, and Capus will depict scenes of financial life in Paris.

The manager of the nickelodeon has his legal problems

to contend with. There is a license to be obtained. There is the consideration of whether he will be allowed to introduce vaudeville into his performance without being required to pay for a theatre license. There are laws to be considered that bring him in contact with the Department of Electricity, the Fire Department, the Tenement House Department, and the Department of Licenses. He has to struggle with the insurance companies, which look askance at the risk. He is now being menaced by a law that is looming up before him, preventing a nickelodeon theatre from being situated in any tenement house where the risk jeopardizes the lives of families living above.

On the other hand, the managers of these small amusement places have to be watched carefully. It has been found that some will take out licenses as operators, and then will transfer these licenses to small boys who are employed in their stead at lower salaries. In New Jersey, to cite one instance, boys of eleven years old were reported as running the machine. The sanitary condition of the places has to be supervised, and the Building Department has found difficulty in making the managers comply with the laws regulating the exits. So many foreigners are now entering the business that it has been found necessary to agitate the adoption of a special bill requiring all managers and operators to be citizens of the United States, as well as residents of the community in which they work. Massachusetts has been markedly active in passing ordinances. One in particular has touched upon the greatest weakness connected with the kinetoscope as an educational or amusement consideration. I refer to the strain upon the sight. After visiting a number of these places in succession, subjecting the eyes to two hours' continual use, it will be found that the persistent flutter of the film not only tires but pains the muscles of the eyes. After careful investigation by some of the lead-

ing physicians in Boston, the Massachusetts Legislature passed a bill requiring that five minutes of light must flood the theatre after every twenty minutes of pictures. This requirement, if it is generally passed through the States, as it should be, will hurt many small places which are only long, dark stores supplied with a number of seats but with no ventilation and no windows.

Inventors are busily engaged in trying to overcome the defects in the moving-pictures. It has been found that the flutter of the film on the screen is due to one of two causes: either the strip is an old one, or there are not a sufficient number of pictures covering the different movements. By this latter statement is meant that were more pictures taken per second, there would be less apparent flutter of the film. A French firm has just avoided any possibility of eye strain by having their films contain many more pictures to the second, thus reducing to a minimum the apparent gap from point to point of action, and thus doing away altogether with any jar. Another important change has been effected. Most of the pictures thrown upon the white screen appear flat; there is no atmosphere behind objects seen. In other words, the figures look as though they were being witnessed by a person with one eye closed. Perfect perspective will soon be given to the kinetoscope theatre performances through a binocular effect.

Still another improvement will come. That will be in the reproduction of natural color upon the screen, the application of color photography to the kinetoscope. The other improvement which is now a fact will perhaps mean more in a general way to the operator than the others. In running his machine, he has always been fearful of fire; the slightest defect in the instrument would result in his film catching fire from the electric spark. The companies are now sending out non-inflammable material.

The important point regarding the moving-picture is that it has educational possibilities. The five-cent audience is not only a clean audience, but is ambitious as well. The manufacturers of films have thus far produced much that is trash, especially in their comic, or what they call harmless, scenes. They have unnecessarily sensational stories, showing that much of their object is to supply a wildcat demand rather than to improve that demand. The five-cent audience is always interested in desirable subjects that will describe the occupations, customs, architecture, and chief racial characteristics of the nations.

The five-cent audience is interested in wild-animal life and in historical views much more than in the ridiculous comedies that are not so suggestive as they are inane. Of course the police have been obliged at times to put a stop to certain subjects thrown upon the screen, not because of their outward suggestiveness but because of their lack of healthy moral. The Children's Court has had to consider cases of grand larceny inspired by the moving-pictures of a burglar. There have been petty thefts committed by children who for five cents have been taught the best way of getting what belongs to others. But as a general rule the nickelodeons, or moving-picture theatres, of which there are some three or four hundred in New York City, present a harmless bill of fare, if not a very educational one.

After examining a number of catalogues of the different manufacturers, and bearing continually in mind that every moving-picture has been the result of actual performance, one is surprised to find the dangers that kinetoscopic actors have to risk in order to depict a given story. Every manufacturer has his paid company of actors, and these have to be richly costumed just as though they were to give a performance on a regular stage. Historical plays are accurately mounted. Not only is scenery prepared, but the actors are

likewise taken into the country where different localities are agreed upon for different situations. The trouble and expense in this respect are great. Only recently in Rochester, two automobiles met with an accident while rushing through the street illustrating for the kinetoscope the abduction of a girl. So that a manufacturer finds more profit in sending his photographers traveling throughout the world, making pictures of pageants, historical scenes, military and naval spectacles, than in mounting rich productions himself.

The kinetoscope, however, has had to adopt many methods of the theatre. One of the chief resorts is dramatization, so we find one concern making arrangements with the author and publisher of "Monsieur Beaucaire" and with the author and manager of "Raffles," and with the publisher and author of "Sherlock Holmes" for the privilege of dramatizing. The kinetoscope dramatist, so to speak, takes wherever he can find. He outlines the story of "Treasure Island;" he adapts Boucicault's "The Shaughraun;" he makes a scenario of "Dora," based on Tennyson; he modernizes "Oliver Twist;" he receives suggestions for Belasco's "Madame Butterfly;" he turns Hawtrey's "Messenger from Mars" into a sentimental tale of a selfish man; he takes the motive of "Othello" and puts it into a story that is the husk without the spirit of Shakespeare. In some cases, where a film has been particularly popular, he is forced to write a sequel. All this is not specially original work, but the moving-picture man expects eventually to encourage the high art of the pantomimist. And there is no doubt that eventually the American dramatist will himself write small plays for the kinetoscope that will accentuate pantomime.

## III

All of these subjects are thrown upon the screen for an eager audience. They are supplemented very often by a word of explanation from the manager, or by a short description printed on the film. Sometimes the phonograph is called into use, but as yet it has not been very successfully employed. The manager must know his pictures, so that if a horse dashes upon the roadway he can imitate the clatter of hoofs; if a man falls from the roof he must represent the crash, just as whenever a clown falls at the circus the drum in the orchestra measures the extent of his hurt. An intelligent manager could inject much humor into his pictures from behind the screen, but he must be careful to keep the moral tone clean. He must also at times watch the realism of his play. In Chicago, according to the *Moving Picture World*, the police stopped the performance of "Macbeth," and the report of the officer of the law is worth quoting: "I am not taking issue with Shakespeare," he said. "As a writer he was far from reproach, but he never looked into the distance and saw that his plays were going to be interpreted for the five-cent theatre. Shakespeare has a way of making gory things endurable, because there is so much of art and finish. But we cannot reproduce that. . . . When it gets on the canvas, it is worse than the bloodiest melodrama ever."

The stabbing scene in the play is not predominant, but in a picture show it is the feature. By outdoing melodrama, the moving-picture has been one of the agents to kill melodrama of the violent kind. In the play, the stabbing is forgotten amidst the other exciting and artful and artistic creations that divert the imagination. On the canvas, you see the dagger enter and come out, the blood flow, and the wound that is left.

Thus it is essential to remember that in externalizing a story for the kinetoscope, the bare details through their very nature sometimes become over-accentuated.

The moving-picture has undoubtedly hurt the theatrical business. It steals the spoken drama and reduces it to motion. Every road company has its tale to tell of business ruined by the kinetoscope; every vaudeville house is forced to open its doors to celluloid drama. And when summer arrives, the legitimate playhouses turn themselves into nickel-odeons. In a way all this is a menace to the American dramatist.



## CHAPTER XIII

### SHOULD THE POETIC DRAMA BE DRAMATIZED?

WE are being constantly reminded of the inadequacy of the so-called poetic drama to fill the essential demands of the theatre; and, whenever the poetic drama fails to hold the boards, we are prone to deplore the insufficiency of public taste. Yet we are servile imitators, and show no willingness to look behind the traditions with which we are often shackled. There is a preconceived notion that something is lacking in the person who declaims against the literary drama, the closet drama, or the poetic drama. Candor makes us confess that there is as much ignorance on the part of those who are against as of those who are for it. The mistaken attitude assumed by both ranks is founded upon a contradiction of terms and upon the identification of the conventions of a type with the essence of the poetic principle.

In our consideration, we would not proceed as far as Poe in that peculiar essay of his on "The American Drama," where he suggests that "the first thing necessary is to burn or bury the 'old models,' and to forget, as quickly as possible, that ever a play has been penned;" we are too thoroughly in advocacy of an historical perspective for dramatic criticism. But we do believe with Coleridge that "it is to be lamented that we judge of books (as well as of plays) by books, instead of referring what we read to our own experience."

All things of the theatre should be applied to the theatre.

An unactable drama is a contradiction of terms; a poetic drama is simply one phase of a larger and more inclusive art. Very recently a college professor declared that the "playhouse has no monopoly of the dramatic form," while another, in just refutation, called attention to the fact that Byron, Landor, Shelley, Coleridge, Johnson, Tennyson, and Browning, whose dramas are relegated to the closet, if not to the shelf, wrote for the stage and failed.

There is only one thing intended for the playhouse, and that is — drama; whatever its form, whatever its content, it must satisfy the conditions through which it has elected to reach the human spirit. To the university man we would say that *poetry* has no monopoly of the poetic spirit; that conventions have deceived us into believing the poetic drama to consist of *such* rhythm, of *such* rhyme, of *such* length, when in reality its vital measure is the exaltation of the human spirit in the light of truth and beauty.

The modern theatre is focussing its rays closer and closer upon life — never upon anything else; it makes no difference whether you are outside the veil with Ibsen peering in; or inside the veil with Maeterlinck peering out — the active being, spirit, intellect, or flesh is concerned with its protagonist.

According to our idea, the poet has not only misinterpreted the functions of drama, but has limited the essence of the poetic to a manner of expression; he has not only been content to deal with life in the abstract, but he has departed from life in search for beauty. Despite these conditions and these counter-elements, we are safe in claiming, nonetheless, that the time is propitious for the poetic drama. It will never come from the poet who lacks the dramatic sense, but it will be born of the dramatist in whom the poetic impulse is quick.

Whenever a poet turns playwright, we may be sure that



*Photo. by Byrd Studio, Cambridge, Mass.*

**JOSEPHINE PRESTON PEABODY**



we are to be treated to a baffling maze of half-formed ideas. It does not do to have the dramatist pause in his essential stage structure in order to listen to his own music. The stage is progressive, not contemplative; direct, not indefinite; particular, not general. Remove from it the power to hold, and it is no longer a theatre in the sense that people would have it.

Such drama, I claim, is twice removed in its relationship to the bare boards of the stage, by reason of its surcharged beauty and by reason of its classic form. For the actor, it is only an exercise in reading; for the audience, it has the heavy odor of crowded flowers, badly arranged. The poet, turned dramatist, is condescending toward the stage; and he has added nothing to the theatre that it did not already know; has gained nothing from the theatre, even though there was much to gain. He has put poetry into the form of drama, without having any drama in his poetry.

When Josephine Preston Peabody's<sup>1</sup> "The Piper" won the Stratford prize, and was played at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre by Benson and his company, in the Spring of 1910, many people proclaimed that blank verse had come into its own again. No manager in America before then would touch it for presentation, and it was once declined by the New Theatre, which hastened later to produce it. There is much to say in extenuation of the American attitude. "The Piper" is drama twice removed — because of its beauty, and because of its form, loosely knit. There is also a pronounced indefiniteness of idea.

Naturally, Mrs. Marks (Miss Peabody) has some justification in her confidence that she has given the stage a notable poetic contribution; naturally she has theories regarding the province of poetry on the stage. But her

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Marks is also the author of "Marlowe" (1901) and "The Wings" (1905).

technical ideas are wrong, and not in accord with the modern practice of the theatre. Maybe, as a poet, she is right in her practice, but it is a rock upon which she will eventually founder. She will there find the battered wrecks of Thomas Bailey Aldrich's "Judith of Bethulia," of Percy Mackaye's "Sappho and Phaon," wrecks beautiful in their dramatic inertia, clogged with the passive beauty of simile and metaphor.

"The Piper," as Mrs. Marks conceived it, had a supreme evidence of vitality about it — its permanent legendary character. We have the nursery interpretation of it in picture books, in Jacob's "More English Fairy Tales" and in Lang's "Red Fairy Book"; and we have Browning's poem. But the structure of the piece, as Mrs. Marks conceived it, detracts from the *Piper's* simple nature, from his real historic character. In search for some deep philosophy of life, the author mixes many minor stories of her own invention into the main threads of an attractive legend, and meanders through long and weary speeches.

"The Piper" is no play in the theatre sense, even though the personality of such an actress as Miss Edith Wynne Matthison has helped to make it a success. It might have been greater, had Mrs. Marks not been the poet so utterly; had she been willing to thrash out the meaning, and to remain constant to one line of thought. And that is the danger of poetry on the stage; it is too discursive and too full of unessential beauty. For this reason, Mr. Moody, who had met with success in "The Great Divide" (1907) because of its theatrical effectiveness, met with failure in "The Faith Healer" (1909) because of its vagueness.

To-day two facts are evident: the realism which is symbolized by Ibsen, and the symbolism which is realized by Maeterlinck have not only intensified dramatic material and narrowed external action, but they have opened a

channel for the actor which only his genius can compass. The worn-out models of the theatre have been confiscated, along with the old-fashioned theatrical methods of interpretation. Introspective significance has decreased the violent reaction, and the most beautiful acting has now become the most quiet acting.

How many of us have returned again and again to Lamb's essay on the "Tragedies of Shakespeare," in which occurs the significant passage, anent the impracticableness of playing "Hamlet" — a passage which reads: "Nine parts in ten of what *Hamlet* does are transactions between himself and his moral sense," — transactions reduced to mere words for the sake of the reader. This leads one to believe that an Elizabethan commentator may some day issue an edition of Shakespeare with passages, called by Lamb "silent meditations," printed in italics to serve as psychological stage directions, after the manner of Shaw.

Nevertheless, there is something in Lamb's argument. His recent adherent is Maeterlinck, who likewise believes in the unsuitableness of unseen forces for *expressive* interpretation. They must be quietly realized. Lamb and Maeterlinck have both found the theatre incapable of solving the problem of meditation on the stage, yet the poetic drama must of necessity deal with just those phases of character and of destiny which are hardest to reconcile with custom and habit and familiar, commonplace movement.

Dramatic literature of recent years represents a revulsion from conventional notions which have grown up around ancient models. Quotidian happenings in the development of the individual have been raised to high dignity. All of this change has brought a consequent change in the poetic drama; the scope of the playwright has become wider with the development throughout the world of more democratic tendencies in society. The entire progression is indicated

by Maeterlinck's statement that whereas once there was no poetry in drama save that which narrated the passion of a lover like *Romeo* or *Tristan* or *Paolo*, now a cottager seated alone by a lighted lamp in the midst of the forces of Fate, is more vitally true, and more profoundly significant for us all. Violent activity must be attached to a spiritual centre, to what Coleridge terms a point of relative rest.

The poetic drama is therefore in the process of adjustment; when we demand it for our stage, we do so with preconceived notions of literary excellence and of poetic fervor which, when put to test, fail to stimulate the active curiosity of external vision, and clog the dramatic progression by an overplus of "sublime images," — in themselves demanding a slow mind. Drama moves continuously; the poetic drama, with its demand upon imagination, its appeal to the moral judgment, and its lack of "corporal dimensions," requires to be read. The mind of the reader must be allowed to turn back; the mind of an audience can never turn back.

The poet who writes for the stage should ever remember that the average theatre judges him by his *explicit* word; through this is the *implicit* meaning caught. Most attempts of the unskilled playwrights to deal with symbolism have resulted in an inevitable quality of indefiniteness — mere decoration without the fundamental surety of nature beneath. For even imagination has its consistency; we understand only in so far as we ourselves have experienced. Hence, when Lowell claimed that to be a mystic gave no one the license to be misty, he meant that no matter how deeply ingrained are the elements of life in art, they must not baffle one who is sufficiently developed to be on that plane of comprehension.

It is well to approach our subject from these various indirect channels, for the poetic drama is not a special form, *per se*; but, to our manner of thinking, any play in which



humanity is raised to the heights of greatest spiritual activity or fulfilment. Poetry, therefore, becomes only one of the numerous factors that make drama what it is. Blank verse does not constitute the poetic drama, though some may think so; heightened speech, so beyond the realm of consistent usage, is not its distinguishing mark. Poetry may only hope to have its significant place on the stage when it expresses spiritual quality and psychological strength, amidst environment which allows of such intensive development, and yet which remains familiar.

"Art for art's sake," said Mr. Herne, who in America has thus far come nearest giving us the poetry of the common life, "is mere decoration, but I will not take the truth for truth's sake with the realist, unless it be the *essential* truth." Hence, our new poetic drama will occupy a position much like the oft-conceived "third empire," so carefully developed by Ibsen; consistent art with consistent truth, art consistent with truth, essential art with essential truth — these are the statements. Ibsen has shown the vital meaning in the common thing; Emerson has told the common man of the vital thing. From the mystic and the realist combined, we in America should be able to evolve a poetic drama. We are not lacking the content but the form.

The inevitable conclusion stares us in the face. Our great English poets wrote for the theatre, and most of them failed; Macready thrust Browning to the fore; Irving preserved Tennyson for a while. It is wrong to say, as though there were a constitutional incompatibility between the two, that the reason why these men failed lay in the fact that literature is divorced from the stage. The real matter is that the poet, however much he might love the theatre, has never mastered the technique. The miniature painter and the mural artist do not use the same brush, though the latter might find it necessary at times to employ a hair line.

Shall we, therefore, have to confess that the poetic drama needs to be dramatized. This is only a facetious way of saying that out of a mass of beauty and fancy, of imagination and meditation, the poetic drama must be lifted into a plane of kinship with common sense and human development. In Chicago, as I have already noted, "Macbeth" was given before a nickelodeon audience in moving-pictures; the police had to stop the performance, so violent the action; the whole spiritual quality of the piece had been sacrificed for the shell. The poetic drama has suffered from the other extreme!

Coleridge, metaphysician though he was, nevertheless realized the need for a reconciliation between characters as they exist ordinarily with their manner and speech, and the same characters idealized in proportion, stressed in language, filling a large destiny rather than doing an ordinary deed. Until Ibsen arrived, we had only a vague notion as to the utilization of the commonplace on the stage; we were told by the text-books that a play dealt only with the significant moments in the development of the individual — and by significant they meant violent or picturesque. The melodramatists abused this idea, the romanticists and sentimentalists conventionalized it. Then Ibsen, even though tarred with the pitch of Scribe, wrote "A Doll's House," and soon followed it with the white-heat realism of "Ghosts," and brought the soul out of its shreds and patches into the familiar light of day — familiar and sometimes cruel, though hardly unnecessary.

The little moments in life pulsed with vitality; Ibsen used the ordinary speech of intercourse, and surcharged it with spiritual intensity. Curiously, before Ibsen was known in America, Mr. Herne had exemplified by his "Margaret Fleming" what depths lay in the tragic of the commonplace; he had instinctively worked out for himself, despite

the fact he was forced back into the old subterfuges of the melodramatist, the whole theory of the active presence of hidden forces — a recognition which quickens the entire gamut of life and raises the ordinary into the realm of the poetic.

When Mrs. LeMoyné presented "A Blot on the 'Scutcheon," the one of Browning's plays nearest stage requirements, the weight and beauty of the lines turned the audience into passive listeners of something being read aloud. We forgive in opera what we will not countenance in drama; long recitative passages are colored by music which serves as the necessary stimulant to emotion. The poetic drama popularly conceived, needs to be relieved of its overweight. Percy Mackaye's "Sappho and Phaon" and Stephen Phillips's "Ulysses" suffered from this accentuation of beauty to the detriment of *motive* power; Hauptmann's "The Sunken Bell," with all the excellence of its symbolic texture, dragged in the moralizing speeches which dulled the mind. The same heaviness is evident in Ridgely Torrence's "El Dorado" (1903) and "Abelard and Heloise" (1907). The need for dramatization is commensurate with the wearying effect upon the average audience.

Maeterlinck, after having tested a theory of the unexpressed in drama, so marvelously worked out in "The Intruder," finally arrived at the conclusion that "whatever the temptation, he [the dramatist] dare not sink into inactivity, become mere philosopher or observer;" he learned through experience with his "puppet theatre" that no situation should be held in abeyance to profundity of speech. The poet, according to Coleridge, has handicapped his success in drama through certain self-conceit; he has forced the actor, who is supposed to interpret character, to stand still and read long descriptions of his own psychology, when, if he be a real actor, he could have suggested all by a flash of

expression or a gesture. It is true, as Henry Arthur Jones intimates, that realism is only justifiable where there is spiritual beauty beyond; poetic license has too often tried to find justification in moral degradation, defying all the laws of reality and of truth.

If this be so, we may turn to Shaw's comments on Shakespeare, the essence of which is expressed in his belief that wherever emotional climaxes are reached, "we find passages which are Rossinian in their reliance on symmetry of melody and impressiveness of march to redeem poverty of meaning." His quarrel with the theatre of Shakespeare is our quarrel with the general conception of the position poetry occupies in drama. Most poets regard the drama, not as a reflex, a transcript of life, but as a commentary on life, expressed through the medium of dialogue; they subject everything to their own artistic needs, believing, no doubt, that the predominance of true poetry will cover up the lack of drama, whereas it only serves to accentuate the fact that drama is not there.

The commendable feature about William Vaughn Moody's "The Great Divide" is found in his proper, though not perfect, use of the poetic content in the dramatic mould; it possesses elemental largeness, and its characters are human, retaining their average proportions in the midst of their spiritual aspirations and expansion. Mr. Mackaye's "The Scarecrow," based on Hawthorne, attempts almost successfully to combine the hidden force with the outward expression, but he does not quite reach the texture of New England conscience.<sup>1</sup>

A surprising proportion of any poetic play deals either with irrelevant imagery, or with mental introspection which precedes action. From speech, it falls into declamation;

<sup>1</sup> In its acted form, however, with Mr. Frank Reicher in the title rôle, it was most effective.

from character it passes into nothing more than a vehicle for theory or poetic idea, cut aloof from the essential meaning of the moment. That is what Israel Zangwill's "The Melting Pot" suffers from, apart from his abominable method of seeking humor. His hero does not express the conviction which lies within, but utters Mr. Zangwill's apostrophes upon that migration of races whose fusion will some day constitute the American people. A note of insincerity results where bombast predominates; Dickens's American Eagle crying *ha, ha!* is not an agreeable picture. Yet speech after speech, poetic in scope, was thrust upon Zangwill's hero relentlessly.

We know that life is greater than drama; that art, whatever its form, is only a means of expressing our comprehension of the life in which we find ourselves. But most of our poets who have attempted drama have not realized how close to life drama really is. It is not a vehicle, but an expression; it does not hold, but it *gives out*. "Peter Pan" represents the genius of Barrie, dramatizing Wordsworth's "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," in terms of common experience and of eternal truth. "What Every Woman Knows" and "Quality Street" do not defy the laws of the familiar, yet both plays are shot through with the poetry of sentiment.

Far from disparaging the poetic drama, we claim that our stage thirsts for it. Yet we do not blame the manager for being wary of the conventional form, which has neither profited by Maeterlinck nor learned of Ibsen. The pulse of life throbs through the land; there is in our mundane existence the call to higher things; from the wheat fields year after year comes the cry for labor — the epic cry from the soil. The poet stands confused before the dilemma. "How," he questions, "shall I reconcile the poetic language with the man of wage, with the machinery of utility, with the average moments of life?" Man has his exalted feelings,

even when his feet are firmly planted upon earth. I remember once walking along a country road with Clyde Fitch; we passed a fleshy, grimy beer-driver in the open field, with a flower in his apology for a buttonhole. "There," said Mr. Fitch, "is the poetry of ordinary existence."

At supreme moments, language, thought, spirit, become supreme. The blacksmith may talk in the poetry of his uncouth prose; but no one can take from him the purity of his feeling when his feeling is pure, or the high resolution of his character, when circumstance and situation prompt it to act, or the strength of his primal being when he is strong. The poet must not mould his character to suit a preconceived notion; in drama one must be true to life rather than to the conventions of art. We know of no form for the theatre other than drama — drama which is divided into relative grades, dependent upon the predominance of certain artistic qualities. Even in dealing with the unseen, Maeterlinck never fails to refer to "active" forces. Only on rare occasions does the average person speak aloud to himself; that is why the soliloquy has fallen into ill-favor. And so, one by one, the conventions of drama are disproven.

We need another name for that play which we have been accustomed to call "poetic drama"; we need to discover that the old form has falsified beauty, since it has taken it away from character, from life. Only when we have written a real drama in which poetry occupies its essential position in relation to life, will we cease in our belief that the poetic drama needs to be dramatized.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SUNLIGHT, MOONLIGHT, AND FOOTLIGHT

It is a healthy condition for us to have reached in drama, when we become conscious of its presence in the community, and when we are furthermore made aware of its power, both positive and negative. For after all, it is not through accident that the theatre was established, but as a result of the fundamental instinct for expression and as a symbol of some over-towering emotion, within the experience of us all. The old tribal *wocero*, or songs of grief, so excellently discussed by Professor Gummere, while more primitive in form and more elemental in idea than the modern civic response to condition, are not so very far removed in the communal psychology which necessitated them, from the present social response which Le Bon has analyzed in his treatise on "The Crowd."<sup>1</sup>

Hence, the theatre is founded upon what might almost be termed an immutable masonry of human need. We could change Pinero's wisdom in "Mid-Channel," and direct it to our ends by saying that since man and woman and the shape of a hen's egg are the constant facts of life, the theatre is

<sup>1</sup> See chapter in Clayton Hamilton's "The Theory of the Theatre" on "The Psychology of Theatre Audiences," pp. 30-58; also W. P. Eaton's "The American Stage of To-day," in which there is a chapter on "Crowds and Mr. Hamilton," pp. 282-90; also Professor Brander Matthews' "A Study of the Drama," Chapter IV, "The Influence of the Audience," pp. 68-91.

placed beyond human endowment, and finds its sanction in, nay more, is coincident with, the very act of living.

There is no doubt that we have, for the instant, lost sight of the reasons why the theatre exists, even though we are growing more and more conscious of its importance as a social institution and as a cultural and an educational force; we are also not quite sure in our minds whether we have a right to enjoy what we enjoy, even though public decency bars "The Moulin Rouge" from the theatre, and establishes a censorship for moving-pictures.

In our attitude toward the playhouse, we are constantly contradicting ourselves, possibly because we find, with Goethe, that it is easier to do than to think. That is characteristic of communal restlessness, if Le Bon is right in his assertion that an idea must be transmuted into action; therefore, excessive sentiment and symbols are representative of popular taste.

The theatre is not only a source of amusement, but it should be a source of the right kind of amusement; that is the only way in which it will ever become permanently instructive; through vital interest rather than through set and deadly purpose will it ever hope to mould public opinion. If the Mayor of Philadelphia was over-cautious in prohibiting the New Theatre company from presenting Galsworthy's "Strife" in that city, for fear that its labor motive would draw fire from the car strikers then at war (1910), the New Theatre was unwise in heralding its mission — which was to clear the atmosphere of Philadelphia with a little of Galsworthy's philosophy about capital and labor.

Yet the incident is significant, for it points to one of the essential functions of the theatre — to prompt civic thought; and it likewise indicates its true relation to the civic body. It is necessary to emphasize these conditions, inasmuch as our present discussion is to deal with communal consciousness of art and civic interest in art.



Never, within the past twenty years, have we had more cause to be encouraged than over the present status of drama in this country. This is not due to the efforts of the Frohmans, the Shuberts, or any other theatrical concern, although many of their productions have been good; it is not because of the existence of a New Theatre, though the presence of such an institution was an incentive to high endeavor; it is not due to the special faddist who takes up drama, though such patronizing may improve the dilettante without harming the theatre. But beneath these outward activities flows the deep and abiding current of our natures, and when a whole people's sense of life becomes quickened, when its intelligence grows keener, its emotion more clearly defined, its specific knowledge of an institution more marked — in other words, when there is centred upon the theatre, as emanating from an interested public, a radium spot of understanding, the civic consciousness smarts under the necessity for maintaining some standard of theatrical taste.

At first glance, this condition may not be evident, but we only have to ask ourselves why — apart from public love of novelty — we are interested in revivals, to reach some basis for hope that our theatre public has awakened from its slothfulness, its indifference, its prejudice. There were profound humanity and deep, universal spirituality in "Everyman" when first it was brought to this country; no amount of archæology could destroy its universal application. There was delicate realization of the poetry of motion, when the Greek dances, so charmingly interpreted by Isadora Duncan, were first offered to the public. The fact that these dances have been overdone to the point of gross suggestiveness does not alter our belief in the dance as an undying expression of communal emotion.

In the history of the past ten years, the many revivals, offered to the theatre-goers have developed an interest in

the historical phase of the drama, have encouraged the collegiate body to reproduce — in the spirit of accuracy — old dramas, rather than waste energy on some pale imitation of the conventional comic opera. Hence we find the Yale Dramatic Association presenting Ibsen's "The Pretenders" and Sheridan's "The Critic," while the New York City College has spent commendable effort on Massenger's "A New Way to Pay Old Debts." Not to be outdone, for Ben Greet is the real, true father of this archaic impulse in America, as William Poel is in England, the Greet Players have appeared in Marlowe's "Dr. Faustus." You may ask if this has any appreciable effect upon public taste. The result may not be immediate, but the impress on public consciousness, however slight, is nevertheless apparent.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor George P. Baker of Harvard University, and Professor Brander Matthews of Columbia University, give distinctive courses in drama to their students. The Harvard Dramatic Club was the first organization to present Percy Mackaye's "The Scarecrow." On the historical side of Professor Baker's work, Mr. Mackaye, Jules Goodman, author of "Mother," Miss Beulah Marie Dix, part-author of a fantastical piece called "The Road to Yesterday," Miss Josephine Preston Peabody, Winthrop Ames, former director of The New Theatre, John Corbin, and W. P. Eaton were students. Five years ago a course in dramaturgic technique was started, resulting in the success of Edward Sheldon author of "Salvation Nell," "The Nigger," and "The Boss." To further this technical training, the Macdowell Club has established at Harvard a Macdowell Fellowship for the encouragement of young playwrights. Professor Robert W. Herrick of the University of Chicago, gives courses in dramatic composition and in the analysis of plays. It will be remembered also that William Vaughn Moody came from the University of Chicago.

Whereas Professor Baker's method deals with the theory of drama, Professor Matthews adheres to the historical side, well indicated in his book, "A Study of the Drama." Not that he ignores the physical aspects of the theatre, but he believes that the very physical outlines of the playhouse limit the play. Under his tutelage, William De Mille, Louis E. Shipman, George Middleton, and George Broadhurst, have met with success. In this matter of the university's interest in drama, it is well to note that Syracuse Uni-

Let us confess that some of these revivals, though instructive, are wearisome. They are not as diverting as Nora Bayes singing "Kelly" in "The Jolly Bachelors," or as Blanche Ring singing "Yip-i-yaddy" in "The Midnight Sons." If, in some respects, they seem far away from us, the reason is very largely technical. As Professor Matthews has shown in his most recent book on the drama,<sup>1</sup> a play is intimately related to the stage for which it was originally written. The changes which are requisite in a Shakespeare text for the modern stage are indicative in a measure of the differences between the Globe Theatre and the New Theatre. It is quite a natural consequence that Mrs. Patrick Campbell should fail to convey the Greek spirit, when, within the frame of a proscenium arch, she presented a poor English translation of a German version of "Electra," instead of Gilbert Murray's translation of the original. But let the proper setting be employed with the latter, as is possible in the Greek amphitheatre at the University of California, and it is not so difficult to impress one with the proportion and unity and unerring beauty of an ancient drama, even though its conventions are no longer incumbent, and its manner far removed.

We have dropped many adjuncts of the theatre because we have tried to limit the world of drama to the horizon of the footlights. We have devoted ourselves so insistently to subtle considerations of the clash of individual will with individual will, that we have let slip an expression of art which results from such a principle as Le Bon's that "col-

iversity produces original plays; that H. J. Savage of Tufts College, Professor Gayley of the University of California, Professor Richard Burton of the University of Minnesota, Professor W. L. Phelps of Yale University, Professor F. W. Chandler of the University of Cincinnati, and Professor S. M. Tucker of the Brooklyn Polytechnic, are actively engaged in furthering the work.

<sup>1</sup> "A Study of the Drama." Houghton, 1910.

lectivities alone are capable of great disinterestedness and great devotion."

In other words, while the modern drama is attempting through types to appeal to an ever increasing aggregate of individuals, our theatre is ignoring the communal joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, with which all peoples of the same nation are endowed. Du Maurier's "An Englishman's Home" could not stand close, logical analysis, but granted its premises, and it is easy to understand why it stirred the patriotism of Great Britain. It is the melodrama of life which appeals to the crowd.

If one reads dramatic history correctly, therefore, it is very evident that while forms change and the methods of appeal alter, the psychology of the crowd remains fundamentally the same. Not only is this true, but even though our audiences are herded together under the same roof, and no longer, as a general rule, cling to the hillside beneath a clear sky, they go to the Hippodrome as of yore, even though the spectacle is less violent than the ancient one; they witness Ibsen's "Ghosts," not realizing its nearness to "Œdipus"; they applaud Pavlowa and Mordkin, and are gripped by the ecclesiasticism of the Middle Ages, found in Maeterlinck's "Sister Beatrice."

The footlights, the picture frame of the proscenium arch, the orchestra, all tend toward making the theatre more intimate and more subtle. Hence, in the legitimate drama there is a group sentiment rather than a communal sweep, a more calculating effect or artifice than appeals to a great crowd. In fact, the more delicate an actor's art, the more limited his immediate influence, as far as the numbers of his audience are concerned. No one could regard the extensive spectacle of Schiller's "The Maid of Orleans," as given by Miss Maude Adams before fifteen thousand spectators in the Harvard Stadium, as anything more than an interesting

pageant, totally unsuited for any other than visual effect. When the city of Gloucester, Massachusetts, celebrated in 1909 its founding by an elaborate *fête*, during which Percy Mackaye's "Canterbury Pilgrims" was mounted in gorgeous procession, another fifteen thousand were moved in the spirit of popular appreciation of broad color and large *ensemble*. In neither of these attempts did the interest proceed deeper than that created by novelty, but both of them to a great extent suggested the possibility of a communal art, distinctively American in its image and in its historical significance.

Shall the theatre, therefore, be taken at times from the footlight into the sunlight and the moonlight? Is that the quickest and best way of developing a civic consciousness of theatrical art? We look back on the Hudson-Fulton celebration (1909), with its water pageant rather devoid of intent in the day, but brilliantly aglow at night, with its floats far less artistically conceived than the Mardi Gras groups in New Orleans, and we wonder whether this carrying of the art impulse into the open, beneath the sunlight or the moonlight, will tend to sharpen civic appreciation, or simply to cater to a liking for bulk. For even a processional demands the preservation of sequence as well as the maintenance of association; it necessitates the participation of citizens rather than the employment of professional actors.

Once more we have Ben Greet to thank for turning our eyes from the footlight to the sunlight and the moonlight. It was about seven years ago that, with the inestimable assistance of Miss Edith Wynne Matthison, he brought Shakespeare into the open, and the warm sunlight of a summer afternoon played fitfully on *Rosalind's* hair, while in the evening the moon suffused "A Midsummer Night's Dream" with a fairy quality which no incandescence could effect.

That initial impulse was followed later by other move-

ments. It encouraged colleges to amateur endeavor; it made possible the Coburn Players; it suggested festivals to small communities and to social groups in crowded quarters of our cities. In other words, though we harked back to the archaic, we realized that it was only to pick up some art instinct which might just as well be developed to-day as it was in the time when guilds were civically responsible for their parts in royal and religious processions.

This latest evidence of revival, therefore, is not in a true sense a revival, but a resumption of communal expressiveness. Throughout the country there is an incentive to symbolize historic association — at the opening of a bridge, in commemoration of the discovery of a river, in celebration of a country's past, or in the tercentenary of a city's founding. There is every reason to believe that such an impulse, sanely directed, will become properly instructive, and will exert an influence on popular taste.

When art is brought into the sunlight it must be buoyant and not self-conscious; it has to shape itself, not to the one, two, three of theatrical mechanism, but to the pulsating vagaries of nature. *Rosalind's* voice must be suited to the twitter of winging birds, her laugh must wait upon the echo of itself. I have seen "Twelfth Night" in the starlight, when the actors' voices were resonant with a peculiar aloofness, accentuated by swaying trees and by the expressive silence of sleeping things. Nature seems to play with art in the open; that is why art must play with nature. For sunlight tends toward the real emotion and moonlight toward the dreams of an exalted spirit, while both demand that artifice approach nearer and nearer to the essence of art, and that the shadow of a feeling be as expressive as the shadow of a leaf.

The time has arrived for us to make use of our natural resources in our communal expression. This does not mean

that we must desert the theatre, that we must discount the footlight. It simply means that we must not waste the opportunities offered by the sun and moon. It means that in our public education we must be made conscious of the fact that Nature furnishes us with stage accessories which only a communal drama may utilize. The members of the Bohemian Club in California, with their red-wood forest, have revelled in this consciousness since 1878.

Only years will prove whether or not this communal interest will some day result in a special folk-drama, a special folk-music, a special folk-dance, a special folk-pageant. Our contention is that the time is just as propitious now as it ever was in any period of dramatic history. It is only the footlight that has really changed, that typifies theatrical convention. We are just waking up to the fact that we have let slip a valuable asset in art; we have done that, even though we hear everywhere the necessity for our being in harmony with Nature. The Greeks utilized sunlight and moonlight in their communal expression; but we, in accord with our general wastefulness of natural resources, have been artistically blind to all but the incandescent bulb.

When audiences take to the open, their amusements expand to accord with the space around them. An entirely different set of values has to be reckoned with. The open invites only that kind of entertainment which harmonizes with the peace and quiet of the hills on one hand, and with the majesty and beauty of the scenery on the other. The Greeks drew religion and tragedy from the secret sources of Nature; they conducted their dances, they sang their Bacchic choruses, they celebrated their national sentiment beneath the blue sky.

Let us suppose that a stadium was to be erected in New York City. Would an open-air theatre have any appreciable effect upon theatrical condition? Would it create any

special type of dramatist, other than poets to compose choral odes, like those Percy Mackaye created for his father's dream, "Columbus"? Such a playhouse could have no influence whatever upon the conventional theatre, save in so far as pageantry and patriotism might raise the art ideals of the crowd and the honesty of the citizen. In the open air, we can never hope to have the same class of play that is given us in the closed-in theatre. Out of doors demands something strictly pictorial. For subtlety is lost where largeness is demanded, and delicacy of manner has to give way before charm of movement. "The School for Scandal" would scarcely set well on the greensward stage.

Yet masques and carnivals and pageants and civic parades are necessary in the life of a people, and a public stadium might revive old customs and vivify old manners. The open-air theatre invites a new drama and encourages an old form. Some day, Americans may find themselves with a new pageantry of such magnitude that children can learn their history from panorama more real than that now given them in the moving-picture, and as resplendent as that sustained by the mediæval guilds or by the Elizabethan Courts. On public holidays, the theatre in the open air affords the dramatist a new outlet for expression of an expansive kind.

But in order to have this pageantry of high excellence, a species of pageant-master, such as Percy Mackaye has repeatedly described, will have to be trained. And one of the first things he will have to do will be to keep the poet within bounds, for the greensward stage has its limitations, as well as the legitimate theatre. Yet a well-trained pageant-master, even though we are striving for sane celebration of Independence Day and effective demonstration on Columbus Day, is not as necessary for us to have as well-trained stage managers for our roofed playhouses. People flock to the



hillside for a game of football or baseball, and they go to the parks for music only when they are not scared away from the parks by programs too classical for their tastes.

People participate in pageantry when there is an anniversary of civic import. They are sure to seek the open for amusement of a democratic sort. Yet, in order to give people drama at minimum cost, which seems to be the aim of social workers, it is not necessary to go to the open as the only means, especially when the medium of Nature does not invite the modern drama distinctive of our day.

The Civic Theatre<sup>1</sup> has been debated as often as a National Theatre, and some reformers have even gone so far as to seek a Theatre of Ideas, as though there were such a thing. What New York has debated is a stadium, run as our parks are run, only with the endeavor to keep it in touch with the theatrical life of the city. In one way, this might remove the drama of a spectacular kind from the hands of the commercial manager, and place it in control of politicians. A Tammany play might lead to the revival of an old-time custom of the riot, such as used to occur on the London stage when the pit reigned supreme!

The Hippodrome has for several years past presented large splashes of color, and has proven a success only when it has stayed away from the spoken word. We hear much about what an educational institution might do for the theatre, but has any institution ever approached the Shuberts and asked them to mount an historical pageant on the Hippodrome stage?

It is well for a city to drive citizens more into the open,

<sup>1</sup> It is well to recall the excellent endeavor on the part of the late Charles Sprague Smith, Director of the People's Institute, New York City, to coöperate with the theatrical managers. Reduced prices were offered to school children and wage earners, and plays were recommended by a committee. The idea was well meaning, but met with many handicaps.

to educate them in the ways of Nature. To do that, there are better means than by taking the theatre and making it subservient to Nature. The pageant is educational as the college revivals are educational. But Nature demands a play in accord with her own humor. "As You Like It" is typical of this — and with her own setting, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is such a piece. A drama that will train the citizen's ear to the trill of a lark is certainly a drama for all nations, but the hope for a national drama does not lie in the open-air theatre, even though the hope of the poet might rest upon a stadium ode or a pageant choral.

## CHAPTER XV

### FORMS OF AMERICAN DRAMA

#### I

THE American theatre has created no special form of drama; it has not even been original in its rhythm of expression. It has modified types, it has infused much picturesque detail into local condition, it has expressed rather crudely all that is meant by American "uplift," but it has done so in form imitative of English and Continental examples.

But at the present time the American theatre-goer is becoming conscious of form, inasmuch as ideas are in the air which cannot be satisfied with the old moulds. If Augustus Thomas had any spark of mysticism about him, he would express his belief in telepathy through other channels than direct narrative; if the comic opera librettist had been brought up in the school of W. S. Gilbert, his "book" would be more than a transitory vehicle; if the dramatist who turns novels into plays only realized that even a dramatization has a technique and a unity apart from the novel itself, there would be fewer failures in that direction.

The time is ripe for new form, and the only way in which we can determine what that shall be is to determine the real, true meaning of fundamental principles underlying the art. In our day we have seen changes and modifications in several forms; we have even witnessed the creation of special moulds for special amusements. Melodrama rose to a certain pitch of violence, then waned; musical comedy

developed to a certain point and remained there; rag-time music shaped a lyric as ungainly as the cake-walk dance; vaudeville, through the efforts of Tony Pastor and later of Proctor and Keith, was evolved from the variety. Yet, as regards the latter, we have seen it persist, not only in vaudeville, but in comic opera as well.

It is only in the minor forms of theatrical art that we have retrograded. In this very problem of comic opera, we have reverted far from such a type of musical entertainment as Gilbert and Sullivan used to give. Music, song, and dance are welded together in a "show" that depends more on its topical "hit" than on any meaning the piece as a whole might have. Musical comedy is now nothing more nor less than the means of exploiting vaudeville reputation and variety glitter.

In fact, modern musical comedy is a hybrid type, of which the original was John Gay's "The Beggar's Opera" (1728), and it allows one to introduce any feature into the entertainment without disturbing the plot. Ask Harry B. Smith, author of "Rob Roy," "Robin Hood," "The Fortune Teller," and "The Wizard of the Nile"; Henry Blossom, who wrote the "books" for "The Yankee Consul," "Mlle. Modiste," and "The Red Mill"; Frank Pixley, who did "The Burgomaster," "King Dodo," and "The Prince of Pilsen" — they will tell you that the chief difficulty is in "boosting" a "book" after it is written, in securing the proper interpolated lyrics. George V. Hobart not only turns out scores of these flimsy "books," but he is regarded as a general renovator. Musical comedy is in constant need of a steady stream of oxygen.

Fortunes are made in the musical comedy field. The coöperation of Edgar Smith with Weber and Fields; of John McNally with the Roger Brothers; the individual *coups* of Glen Macdonough's "The Wizard of Oz" and

"Babes in Toyland," of Owen Hall's "Florodora," of Hugh Morton's "The Belle of New York" — these are sufficient evidences of the popularity of the form, apart from its permanence or its quality. The facts are these. George Ade's "The Sultan of Sulu" was only a moderate success, yet it brought him an income. George M. Cohan, librettist, composer, and actor, whose songs sell also in the music stores, netting him a royalty, has been known to draw over three thousand dollars weekly as a librettist alone. That is what "Little Johnny Jones," "Forty-five Minutes from Broadway," and "Yankee Doodle" have done for him.

But there is not one of these librettists or of these composers whose work will withstand more than a decade. There is no "book" that will have the vitality of Gilbert's "Patience," or "H. M. S. Pinafore," or "The Mikado." Not one of these names will outlast more than two generations, whereas Meilhac and Halévy are unmistakably identified with Bizet and Prosper Mérimée in "Carmen." Even such a transplanted and effective piece as Lehar's "The Merry Widow" will be imitated, until the imitations dim its freshness. For the "book" is poor.

Experience shows that musical comedy abhors consistency; it is a loose type, even as vaudeville is a loose type. These forms are full of tricks. Vaudeville, it is true, has become legitimized by the introduction of the high-class artist, who gives a form of play in which our American dramatist would do well to indulge; I mean, the playlet. And the custom has now become so fixed, that the best actor, no matter what his winter's work may be, does not disdain the comfortable fortune awaiting him in a few weeks' vaudeville. In this way Henry Miller has utilized Clyde Fitch's "Frédéric Lemaître." Vaudeville, however, has the pernicious effect of moving-pictures; the audience is not held by any unified or consecutive interest; it is, in fact, almost

as casual as frequenters of the nickelodeon playhouses. Out from vaudeville has come excellent material, not of the variety type, but of the art type. Chevalier and Lauder and Genée have danced and sung, Mrs. Campbell has acted, and historians like to call to mind the days when even Edwin Booth did not disdain to blacken his face, or Edwin Forrest to dance a jig.

The chief characteristics of vaudeville will remain, however much its good points are abused by the variety inheritance. It is a form dependent on one's like for disassociation of ideas; it is amusement cultivating nervous strain rather than resulting in permanent effect.

The dramatization of novels cannot be called a new form, for Shakespeare looms in the past, an inimitable adapter of the *conte*. Professor Matthews, in his "Pen and Ink," has a suggestive chapter on this process, and we note that it has become a custom in every country to benefit by the inventive faculty of the novelist. For, while I cannot agree with Paul M. Potter, adapter of "Trilby," that the passionate story is all an audience seeks, I do believe that an interesting story, in novel form, might be very well utilized by the dramatist, but, mind you, in the dramatist's way. In other words, the latter must take liberties with the former, in so far as the technique of the latter differs from that of the former.

Mr. Potter is rash when he claims that the drama is not dependent upon the intellectual element. But it is easy to fall into platitudes, and Mr. Potter's belief that "if the feelings of the audience are rightly moved, the play succeeds," has nothing to prove. For audiences are moved intellectually as well as passionately, and, what is more, they have a common spirit which passion only indirectly appeals to. When one looks back on "The Eternal City," "The Only Way," "The Prisoner of Zenda," "When Knight-

hood was in Flower," "Janice Meredith," and countless other dramatizations, when one regards the work of Potter, of Rose, of Kester, and of an increasing host, one is tempted to believe that dramatization has become a form — a manufactured form — readily manipulated, but built only to last a season. We have seen how often the American dramatist has either dramatized or adapted. Boucicault lived upon the process; it even dulled his originality, though it did not paralyze his resources of inventiveness.

But the ease with which novels have been turned into plays has presented a mistaken idea to the novelist regarding the stage. The process has been detrimental to the drama as well as to the novel. There is no reason, however, why lasting plays should not be taken from books, save that where there is a slavish dependence upon the story as told, there is a consequent lack of intensity and of close technique. The reading public scares the dramatizer, for when a book is popular, and only popular books are dramatized, the dramatist has to keep faith with what the public already knows.

## II

I do not think that it is so necessary for the student of American drama to trace minutely the varying forms in which drama expresses itself. It is enough that we are imitative in farce, in comedy, in social drama, in the problem play, in every form imported from abroad. What should concern us, however, is a subject that narrows itself down to two points: comedy on one hand, and tragedy on the other. How fare these with us, not as form, but as spirit; not as convention, but as attitude, as national outlook?

If our American humor is what we claim it to be, then our comedy should be rich. And no one may complain of this, remembering Mark Twain, George Ade, and Peter F.

Dunne (Mr. Dooley). If our American sanity is a fact, then our recognition of the Tragic Spirit, as opposed to the special form of tragedy, must be pronounced. Our American dramatists of the closet drama employed the old classic form of catastrophe, but that has passed out of date with the coming of modern technique. Our early American humorists gave types caricatured as we have seen in *Sellers*, in *Solon Shingle*, and in others, but the human view, which lies at the basis of realism, has modified every form of comedy and tragedy, and there is only left the deep and abiding spirit of each with which to cope.

### III

There is no business more speculative than that of defining things; lexicographers are not given the prophetic vision, and only one, so far, — Dr. Johnson — has possessed the literary sense. No matter what limitation we place upon the meaning of a word, time overrides it and creates a periodic point of view.

Since Aristotle framed his classic definition of tragedy, we have been called upon to reckon with drama in terms of Shakespeare on one hand, and in terms of Ibsen and Maeterlinck on the other. Literary history has taught us to be wary of declaring old formulæ useless. Hence, there has become evolved a type of criticism which is more interesting because of its angle of vision than because it throws any deep and abiding light upon the fundamental starting-point.

Professor Ashley Thorndike wrote a volume for a series called "The Types of English Literature," and he gave it the inclusive title of "Tragedy." What the reader finds to be the case is, that beginning with certain general premises, he discusses the modifications attendant upon all practice, and in this case subject to national characteristics. And, after reading through the chapters, a truth is impressed



upon us: tragedy, as a mere form, is not constant, but is a convention of art, subject to conventional social ideas and ideals. The Tragic Spirit behind the sequence of things, or rather within and coincident with the evolution of humanity, is more eternal and more universal.

We have not yet had a treatise on the Tragic Spirit that has not paid greater attention to the comparative estimate of dramatists in the university or academic manner, than to the psychological reasons for the existence of the spirit itself. Gummere considers the *vocero*, or tribal songs of grief; here is a primitive basis, unhindered by any cumbersome body of literature, — a basis upon which to reach some physical recognition of tragedy. Perhaps, in a small and not wholly satisfactory manner, W. L. Courtney has suggested quite as much of the historical perspective in a survey of "The Idea of Tragedy" as one would need, in order to arrive at some conception of the tragic, not as a form but as a principle.

Now, what has happened in this wild and seemingly ineffectual groping for the defining marks of tragedy? Aristotle, in true greatness of the Greek spirit, attempting to reduce the problem to its simplest points, yet including all its essential connections with life, as the Greek philosophers saw life, used general rather than specific terms: "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper *katharsis*, or purgation, of these emotions."

The danger of literary study is that, too often, we are side-tracked by minor interesting problems. Not only are there students working in the oppressive style so well exemplified in Dr. Schelling's "Elizabethan Drama," where

streams of fact measure a certain orderliness of mind, without expressing the breadth of spiritual view — forgetful of the life and of the personality in the fractional difference of the fact — but a literature has grown up around the interpretation of a word. In Butcher's translation of Aristotle, he analyzes the Greek conception of "the function of tragedy," and deals with those critics, including Lessing and Goethe, who have debated and challenged the translation of the word *katharsis*, or purgation. You see how subtly one may be drawn into a profound discussion of the ethics of an art, losing sight of the essentials under consideration.

The subject is a big one and a human one; on one hand, you have the conventions of the stage in different ages, affecting the form of tragedy; on the other, there are the moral and social standards which have moved the individual along the scale of increasing importance. We have had considered for us Greek tragedy, Roman tragedy, and, in modern times, tragedy reacted upon by English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian temperament. But the basic reasons for the support and development of the Tragic Spirit, whatever the environment, have not had a popular, a readable exposition. That Americans, for example, do not care for tragedy as a form of drama, and blind themselves to the Tragic Spirit, is not due to a predominating cry in the illogical vein of the Dr. Fell couplet. Nor may we go so deep as ethnology for an explanation. But a perspective view of our human response to social and economic fact will give us cause to believe that comedy, in its richest sense, measures our dramatic taste.

In Greek tragedy, we consider the abstract will struggling against a religious attitude toward Fate. In Shakespeare, there is the human will centered upon personality, struggling, not against Fate, but against time and circumstance. In Ibsen and Maeterlinck, the stage contracts, becomes cen-

tered in personality effected by all the currents of time. I have elsewhere said that Ibsen unfailingly approached optimism, save in the case of "Hedda Gabler" and "The Wild Duck," through pessimistic channels; that his indignation was health-giving, and counteracted the bitter realism of his temporal contemplation. Maeterlinck, in the tracks of Emerson, has taken all the abstract ideas of the Greeks — the concepts of destiny, righteousness, truth — moving in an outside sphere, and has compressed them within and around the individual.

Tragedy of old had a conventional idea that only the highly bred, the kings, the princes of the universe, were subject to the cataclysmic reversals of Nature. But the modern note accentuates a democratic level, and, as we have "The Treasure of the Humble," so we, perforce, come to consider "the tragical in daily life."

"I have grown to believe," writes Maeterlinck, "that an old man, seated in his arm-chair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him; giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house; interpreting, without comprehending, the silence of doors and windows, and the quivering voice of the light; submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and his destiny, . . . motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human, and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or 'the husband who avenges his honor.'"

Here, then, the modern concept of tragedy, even in its formal state, takes on a new aspect; the heightened swing of blank verse has had to contend with the commonplace vitality of Ibsen prose. But the essence of the form, which is the Tragic Spirit, has become almost personal in its source.

In most cases, literary history has shown that dramaturgic

conventions may generally be defied. The comic idea has spread in such directions as to approach the tragic. Someone refused lately to write a book on comedy because the subject was so inclusive in its reach, under modern theatrical nomenclature. No longer does a tragedy necessarily imply death; no longer does death have to occur off the stage. Technique and philosophy have thrown into temporary disuse the soliloquy, which largely expressed narratively what Ibsen could place into seemingly trite dialogue, what Maeterlinck, in such a perfect piece of psychology and clinical observation as "The Blind," treats through the atmospheric quality of his Ollendorffian talk — which is only Ollendorffian, by the way, when it is badly read.

Maeterlinck has given us "The Life of the Bee"; neither has science refuted his observation nor economics his social statement; yet primarily his essay is no text-book on apiculture, no discussion of the social unit. My contention is that scholarship only half sees, or, more aptly, sees only half of the subject it considers. Tragedy needs yet to be viewed in the Maeterlinckian fulness.

This does not mean that one should try to sense instinctively the Tragic Spirit, though the true artist assuredly becomes freer as he divines his substance and its essential form, rather than bases it upon studied or remembered models. One writes tragedy only when the Tragic Spirit moves him forcefully, only when it emanates from the material which is his choice. I quote Maeterlinck: "None but yourself shall you meet on the highway of Fate. If Judas go forth to-night, it is toward Judas his steps will tend."

Life is so closely knit with the tragic and the comic, that defining will not account for all the forms that arise therefrom. Abstractly stated, we see the Tragic Spirit as one unchangeable principle — wherein agony, despair, grief,

pain, tend toward the dissolution of the human will. Comedy may yield to the darker balance of life, becoming serious, grave, even destructive, yet still we would keep from designating it as tragedy.

Therefore, even though "A Doll's House" and "Ghosts" be painful in their outcome, though "Hannele" wrench the heart with its pathetic child symbol, though Pinero's "Iris" be the tragic dragging of a woman into the gutter, we theatre-goers are at a want for the phrase by which to call them. Ibsen wrote no tragedies during his later life, in the accepted sense of the word; yet in no modern playwright is the Tragic Spirit so clearly realizable — which in no way detracts from his positive influence.

Somehow, form has crept into the popular conception of the outward expression by which the Tragic Spirit is recognized. Is it necessary to have the lofty style, the exaggerated speech, the melancholy event, the florid diction, the stately action? Then truly the cottage and cabin are no scenes for tragedy, and the commonplace contains no essence of the same. It is the great flow of circumstance, of time, of infinitude around the lowly, that must be reconciled with the accustomed height and swing of the art form.

Verily, the student's perspective is needed by the writer on tragedy, but it is his imagination and his constructive ability that will aid him most. For the Tragic Spirit in man is that which gives life to tragedy, and the product may only be a faint reflex of the principle. That is where Greek art overreached the limits of its time; it was conceived clearly in the spirit of highest Greek endeavor; it was based upon the concepts of eternal principles. Thinking was not imitative; it was pristine. Men spoke like oracles, stating law as above fact.

Tragedy, as a form of art, is at the present, furthest removed from the American spirit — from the democratic

spirit. I, nevertheless, take the attitude that we must not blind ourselves to the existence of the Tragic Spirit, even though we do not accept tragedy, *per se*, on our boards. Ibsen's voice proclaims its presence underlying the ills of our social organism; Maeterlinck's philosophy shows the lowliest soul confronted by the problems of eternity. We respond in terms of the comic, but the American people cannot be blind to the tragic in their lives.

We meet misfortune in the comedy spirit of youth. Take the ravages of the Civil War and the epic response afterward among Southerners, who faced the future with supernal faith. Take the San Francisco earthquake and the reaction that resulted in the rebuilding of a city. No one will deny the presence there of the tragic element. Perhaps we are prone to lose sight of it in the reaction of the American spirit itself, after the tragic event.

Undoubtedly, the old dramatic terms, though rigidly defined by lexicographers, are becoming too narrow to hold the varying forms. And no doubt, with the principle of Ibsen on one hand, and with that of Maeterlinck on the other, we are tending toward a new form. This will be considered later. But, at present, we need some treatise on tragedy which will estimate its essential spirit as well as its varying expression. We speak frankly in our magazines and on our stage, of conditions involving sexual relations and struggles in environment. Yet, though we see souls dragged to the depths of despair in Walter's "The Easiest Way," though Jones's "Mrs. Dane's Defense" gives us another form of social evil, and Nirdlinger, in "The World and His Wife," represents the grave consequences of social gossip, still we find staring us in the face on our program the word "comedy." And our attitude becomes that of comedy toward the vital problems of life, simply because we will not countenance on our stage, or in our ordinary pursuits, the

form of tragedy, and we have failed to identify in our national life the presence of a Tragic Spirit.

#### IV

The Comic Spirit is an illusive factor in literary history; it is a deep and subtle principle in life. Raised from its Bacchic origin, it has become the very core of sanity, it has become the true moral corrective of tragedy. Perhaps we are losing sight of this in our demand that a name cover many species, until at last the pure type is confounded with the hybrid. But, nevertheless, for richness of humanity, for breadth of view, for deep understanding, the Comic Spirit has a range that embraces a large sweep of life.

To him who views the world aright, there are always the action and reaction, the tension and relief. In tragedy, the emotions are so powerfully involved that one is no longer able to measure the deviation from the normal view; but a real value of the Comic Spirit depends almost wholly upon our realization of how far we have deflected from the truth. We can only reach the latter state when we have adequately become informed of the former. We arrive at the pure comic when we have sounded the depths of full existence.

Now, this view of comedy has been lost to the present-day playgoer; most of our writers either avoid the subject as being too abstract for journalistic purposes, or else discuss new forms herded together under an old name. If we look into the philosophy of the matter, we find the psychologist too intent upon the physiological reasons as to why we laugh, and the metaphysician too loath to handle the subject in the concrete. Yet, in the scattered cases where writing has been done on the Comic Spirit, the humanistic aspect has been surely persisting, and its right to be

regarded as the sane view seems justified in the light of accomplishment.

Within past years, we have had evidences of an existing sense of the Comic Spirit among our dramatists and players. Mr. Barrie would approach very near to it, if his piquancy of outlook was not limited by an agreeable mannerism of narrative style. After a fashion, he defined the true comedy position when, in "What Every Woman Knows," *Maggie Wylie* declared that no one could love her who could n't laugh at her a little.

When Percy Mackaye wrote "Mater," his intention was to imbue American conditions with the essence of comedy, illustrating by way of political satire the fundamental note in life, that "the test of love — and the best of love — is laughter." But at present his spiritual desire is more defined than his understanding of the body politic, and Mr. Mackaye's Comic Spirit, as expressed, comes in flashes rather than in even flow.

Paul Kester, essaying to make a drama from "Don Quixote," conceived his knight-errant in terms of situation, rather than in terms of the rich defects of the character. In this latter respect, Mr. Sothorn was the only one who approached Cervantes' original conception — to picture the weakness of over-romantic chivalry, at the same time fully realizing perfectly the innate perfectness of the true gentleman. His acting raised Mr. Kester's play, by enforcing the personal dignity of the character.

Take what comedy you will, in which there flows any of the red blood of life, and, after analysis, you will find that the Comic Spirit is not haphazard, is not shallow, is not easy to grasp. One must be very near to life in order to feel it, and must have asked one's self questions regarding the eternal verities, as well as have answered them.

I have chosen to confine myself entirely to the Comic



Spirit as affecting drama, realizing at the outset that we must not identify it exclusively with the stage, inasmuch as we have Thackeray, Balzac, La Fontaine, Cervantes, Rabelais, and Chaucer richly entitled to consideration in the larger field. But I am taking the stage, for I am aware that, curiously, it is there that the fullest meaning of the Comic Spirit is in greatest danger of being submerged. There are some audiences so regaled by the fun-making of Eddie Foy and James T. Powers — thoroughly clever as far as they go — that these same audiences do not see the sweet human defects that bring one to the verge of tears. Why not, they argue, call “’Op o’ My Thumb” a tragedy and be done with it?

All is not gold that glitters, saith the proverb; which means, theatrically, that our stage is too filled with song and dance to comprehend the Comic Spirit. Mr. Mansfield never once builded upon our reaching the human and interpretative importance of Molière’s “Misanthrope.” He planned simply to satisfy his own desire to add to the honor of the stage; he was not disappointed, for Molière was not a popular success. Yet it is the duty of our critics to point the way to what the Comic Spirit means in the affairs of life. Our stage revivals are received with too much willingness to understand the archæological shroud, and with no cultural perspective to note wherein the unctuousness and live quality lay. It is part of the university’s province to quicken the past. And so, I welcome Dr. Curtis Hidden Page’s translations of Molière, not only because they are an aid to the English reader, but because in the lucidity of their style they are adequate for stage presentation, with practical and judicious excisions. I believe it is given the audience to sense the essence of the comic without knowing why or how. This is seen in that instantaneous response of the reading public, for example, to Aldrich, to

Mark Twain, to Holmes; and in the merry laugh over "Uncle Remus." I see the Comic Spirit swell the meaty substance of Henry James' sentences. It is not that the Comic Spirit is wanting, but that our vision of it has been warped by other forms which are, in comparison, even as paste jewels. It is surprising that we have so much of the richness of the comic in the face of newspaper supplements and musical comedies. We will have greater plays of the Comic Spirit just so soon as we are everywhere alive to its whole value. It were well for us, indeed, when we reach that stage of culture where we can grasp the humor of our faith without in the least relinquishing its sanctity. In deep reverence, I have heard portions of the Book of Mark read for the purpose of illustrating the rich essence of Christ's humor. Comedy and right living are closely related ideas.

At the beginning of a chapter on "Greek and Roman Comedy," in Professor Matthews' "The Development of the Drama," the author attempts to indicate a terse distinction between tragedy, serious drama, and comedy, basing the whole upon Brunetière's law — which after all is only Brunetière's restatement of the law of drama from time immemorial, — that all drama deals with the exercise of the human will. "If," so writes Professor Matthews, "the obstacle against which the will of the hero finally breaks itself is absolutely insurmountable, the Greek idea of Fate, for example, the Christian decree of Providence, or the modern scientific doctrine of heredity, then we have tragedy, pure and simple. If the obstacle is not absolutely insurmountable, being no more than the social law, something of man's own making, and therefore not finally inexorable, then we have the serious drama. If the obstacle is only the desire of another human being, then the result of the contention of these two characters is likely to give

us a comedy. And if the obstacle is merely one of the minor conventions of society, then we may have farce."

These are merely perfunctory demarcations, with only one phase of the matter indicated; for in no way do the several definitions clearly denote the measurement of the comic or tragic clash with the norm. The ethical, moral value of laughter lies in the fact that it makes us more sane, by bringing more truly into relief, through some slight incongruity of motive or situation, the benefits of the normal life. Throughout his discussion of Aristotle, Butcher is continually emphasizing the humanistic, philosophical view of comedy, which distinguishes the modern from the ancient. He lays stress upon Hobbes' claim that "the passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory, arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison of the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly." The high comic poet must taste of life healthily, and see that it is good, before he formulates a table of contrasts. Knowing life, as it is given the big man to know it, he allows himself to throw relations out of harmony to the point where he is in danger of losing all hold upon the sane view.

The Comic Spirit, therefore, represents one of the highest factors, if not the highest, in life. From the modern standpoint, it approaches closer to the ethical demand, since it represents optimism rather than pessimism. "Comic emotion," Dr. Guthrie claims, "originates from the co-existence of a perception of incongruity and a persistent conviction, not probably more than half conscious and in all likelihood quite inexplicit, that in despite of such incongruity things are right."

The Greeks did not conceive the Comic Spirit in as pure a state as they did the Tragic Spirit; they could not wholly separate it from the Bacchic on one hand, or from the satiric on the other. "The ludicrous," as defined by Aristotle,

"consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive." The Greeks denied tears to laughter: they well-nigh sacrificed sympathy. There was some malice in their enjoyment of "discomfiture," as Butcher so well analyzes. They did not look to the comic for a criticism of life in general; they narrowed to the individual, sacrificing the type; they satirized with no regard for sane restraint. To them the Comic Spirit dwelt within the lower types.

As usual, we next turn attention to comedy in Shakespeare, as illustrating the rich humanistic view of character, devoid of buffoonery; one finds the full value in the character of *Viola* and in that of *Malvolio*. Life is warm, replete in sunshine here, with no poisoned shafts, but ripe in sympathy with human foibles, in kindliness. "Twelfth Night" is Shakespeare's midsummer in comedy, declares Professor Dowden.

In a broad sense, Molière is more nearly representative of the Comic Spirit than Shakespeare, although in a few instances the latter attained the pinnacle of preëminence. The former, however, clearly illustrates that perfection with which the comedy of manners, exquisitely representing its age on one hand, may likewise embrace a universal consideration. Scribe is Molière perverted.

"I can never care for seeing Things that force me to entertain low Thoughts of my Nature," wrote Congreve, in a letter concerning "Humor in Comedy." Take this statement in consideration with the moral status of his theatre, and we begin to realize that it was only through his grasp of the Comic Spirit that Congreve was preserved out of the general licentiousness of the time. He had the faults of his social environment; his genius rose above them, however identified with them, however shaped by them. Congreve means brilliancy of dialogue, and a sense of comic

values, as soon as you are able to realize that he represents also a certain phase of English dramatic evolution. Do you remember Lamb's essay "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century"?

This is no simple subject that we are looking at so cursorily. Its proper consideration involves racial and national limitations and differences. What you smile over, I may not. What the English critic defines as Comedy, the German critic may deny; the one believes in a permanent effect of comedy, the other in simply a transitory effect. To enforce this, Dr. Paul Hamelius quotes Kant's "Kritik of Judgment," which defines "laughter as an emotion occasioned by the sudden resolution of a roused expectation into nothing."

Therefore, generally speaking, the German conception of comedy, as represented in Schlegel, is wild and lawless; and in true German manner, the philosophers, in especial Hegel, interpret the effect this "ignorance of self-restraint" has upon individuality and its vital relations to life, to cause and effect.

The book has yet to be written which will define the Comic Spirit in terms here suggested; the subject is so broad as to make the university worker hesitate. We want a vital discussion, in which tendencies, racial and social, are indicated; it is not enough that individual plays be defined in the scholar's manner. For the average reader is not familiar with plays of much wide diversity of range. That is why George Meredith is perhaps so little known to the general public as an analyzer of "comedy" in a special essay; it is full of learning, of great familiarity with stage history from the closet standpoint. He views his subject with the eye of the novelist. Yet his humanistic approach toward his discursive point of view is replete with unerring appreciation of the true value. "To be an exalted variety," he writes, "is to come under the calm, curious eye of the

Comic Spirit, and be probed for what you are." Again he proclaims that "Comedy is the fountain of sound sense," all expressions of which are deeply conceived, and which, in themselves, refine even to pain.

## V

In analyzing the essence of American humor, Charles Johnston<sup>1</sup> makes an excellent distinction between humor and wit, in both of which there must be the element of laughter. He writes:

"If there is a play of mind about difference of race, using this as the laughter-rousing contrast which is common to both wit and humor, and if this play of thought and feeling accentuates and heightens the race difference, and tries to show, or assume, as is often the case, that the race of the joker is endlessly superior to the other, then we are dealing with wit, an amusing thing enough in its way, but a false thing, one which leads us away from the true end of man. If, on the other hand, we have an accentuation of the common life, bridging the chasm of race, and the overplus of power is felt to be shared in by the two races, and to unite them, then we have genuine humor, something as vital to our true humanity as is the Tragedy of Greece, as is the Evangel of Galilee, yet something more joyful and buoyant than either; uniting us, not through comparison or the sense of common danger, but through the sense of common power, a prophecy of the golden age, of the ultimate triumph of the soul."

Consider these differences carefully, and it will be seen how reversed are the essential spirits of comedy and farce. These are not alone two forms of drama; they are also two outlooks upon life. The great fault with the American dramatist is that often he hides the richness of his humor

<sup>1</sup> *Atlantic*, 87: 195-202, 1901.



*Photo. by Schloss*

EDWARD HARRIGAN





beneath the incongruity of witty situation ; he spoils the good-natured satire of his intention beneath cartoon motives and actions. This was the weakness of Charles Hoyt (1860-1900),<sup>1</sup> author of "A Parlor Match," "A Rag Baby," "Old Sport," "A Trip to Chinatown," "A Texas Steer," "A Temperance Town," "A Contented Woman" (1895), and "A Milk White Flag." His satire was spontaneous, but he became self-conscious whenever he attempted to cross the border into farce. His political pictures, his characterizations of conscientious churchmen, his thrusts against the sporting craze, the temperance movement, the militia, and the woman's rights movement would undoubtedly have placed him among the foremost American dramatists had he not persisted in upsetting his good work, which lay so largely in his ability to contrast, and in his resorting to the ridiculous and the incongruous. Hence, in Hoyt's plays there was an admixture of insight and shallowness.

I should say, therefore, that his farce-comedies were marked by humor, but were spoiled by the form of farce. As for Edward Harrigan (1845-1911), he must be characterized as a delineator of a special type, and with his partner, Tony Hart, he built up the reputation which won him support. For the two were funmakers, as Weber and Fields and the Rogers Brothers were funmakers. In 1871, Harrigan and Hart began their careers in "The Mulcaney Twins"; then there followed in quick succession "The Day We Went West," "The Doyle Brothers," "The Major" (1877), "Old Lavender" (1877), "The Mulligan Guards' Ball" (1879), "The Mulligan Guards' Chowder" (1879), "The Mulligan Guards' Christmas," "The Mulligan Guards' Surprise," and others.

Like the elder Tyrone Power's, Harrigan's pieces depended

<sup>1</sup> See the excellent article by Atherton Brownell in *Bostonian*, 3: 386, Jan., 1896.

upon his acting.<sup>1</sup> There was no art in the writing of them, and they would not read well were they put into print. Nor can we say that they were typical of American humor. In the street sense, George M. Cohan represents the popular conception of American wit, and his ability should not be overlooked. But he does not in any way approach the true humor of George Ade, whose style, even before he became a playwright, was sufficiently conversational in his books to point the way to the stage. That road, however, came into being by the merest chance in 1902.

Ade was born in Kentland, Indiana, on February 9, 1866, his father being a prominent banker of the town. In his youth, the boy tasted of all that country life upon which he was to look back with gentle banter and kindly laughter. In 1887, he graduated from Purdue University, and thereupon began his profession of journalism, which was to lead him to authorship.

By 1890, he was on the Chicago *Daily News*, associating with Harry B. Smith, the librettist of "Robin Hood" and "Rob Roy"; Peter F. Dunne, *alias* "Mr. Dooley"; and Charles B. Dillingham, who, once the personal representative of Miss Julia Marlowe, is now one of the prominent managers of the time. Ade's strides were determined and rapid. In 1894, he became a member of the staff of the

<sup>1</sup> He was also the author of "Darby and Lanty" (1876); "Is-caine" (1876); "St. Patrick's Day Parade" (1876); "Ireland *versus* Italy" (1876); "Lorgaire" (1878); "The Major" (1881); "Squatter Sovereignty" (1882); "The Blackbird" (1882); "Mor-decai Lyons" (1882); "McSorley's Inflation" (1882); "The Muddy's Day" (1883); "Cordelia's Aspirations" (1883); "Dan's Tribulations" (1884); "Investigation" (1884); "The Grip" (1885); "The Leather Patch" (1886); "The O'Reagans" (1886); "Mc-Nooney's Visit" (1887); "Pete" (1887); "Waddy Googan" (1888); "Reilly and the Four Hundred" (1890); "The Last of the Hogans" (1891); "The Woollen Stocking" (1893); "Notoriety" (1894). See Mackaye and Wingate's "Actors of To-day in America."

Chicago *Record*, remaining there seven years, and occupying the desk made vacant through the death of Eugene Field. His "Artie" book and his "Fables in Slang" were written during these years. In 1900, he sailed for China, Japan, and the Philippines. Thus far the reporter was seeing life in various hues.

Then, on his return, a young Chicago composer, Mr. Wathall, asked Ade to write the "book" for a musical score he was preparing for an amateur club. But the actual work had not progressed far when Henry W. Savage appeared upon the scene, and Ade entered as a factor in the American drama, with "The Sultan of Sulu." Then followed in quick succession, "Peggy from Paris," "The County Chairman," "The Sho-Gun," "The College Widow," "The Bad Samaritan," and "Just Out of College." "Father and the Boys" is his most recent successful piece.

All of these plays apply poignantly to American conditions; they make use of a fresh way of forcing the incongruous elements of "news" to act themselves visibly before an audience. They are loaded down with a humor which is that of the man on the street — perfectly legitimate humor, even though viewing life from a lower level of values.

Take, for instance, the predominant object of "The Sho-Gun," which is a Korean opera. "It is meant," explains Mr. Ade himself, "to be an indirect treatise on the worship of titles, the formation of trusts, the potency of the American 'pull,' Yankee commercial invasion, legal manœuvring, advertising enterprise, and other subjects of timely interest."

The saving grace in our strenuous existence is our appreciation of our vagaries; that is why Mr. Ade's comic operas are as stimulating as good cartoons. Besides supplying the sinuous lines of color, they have ideas behind the detail. In this respect, Mr. Ade is not so very far re-

moved from W. S. Gilbert, though lacking in facility and in grace. He has defined American drama as one in which American characters are dealt with "in such manner as to increase our self-respect and to give us a new insight into our characteristics as a people."

Mr. Ade's humor has all the essence of good comedy, but its form is unsteady and is too imitative of the conventional musical comedy and of farce. I do not believe I am far wrong in the contention that our stage has yet to understand the true meaning of comedy, and especially so when it starts out to create comedy in a spirit which is really farce.

However incomplete our discussion, we have at least come to comprehend the justice of accusing our stage of misinterpreting the true, permanent function of comedy. We need a new nomenclature in order to divest the pure type of its confusing deviations. Because we have lost the rich meaning of comedy, we find it difficult, save in "An Enemy of the People," to understand the Comic Spirit in Ibsen, and it is only by this realization that we will grasp the full significance of Ibsen's optimism. Humor is innate; it is dependent as much upon a quick fancy as upon a quick response to the actual. Though it is not self-conscious, our efforts toward culture ignore the strength that comes from a general understanding of the Comic Spirit. Our American dramatists mostly reflect their humor as an external thing, though there is a difference of excellence between Mark Twain and George Ade; between George Ade and George M. Cohan. Raise the taste for the true Comic Spirit, which saturates humanity first, and creates situation secondarily, and the American dramatist will become more vital in his whole effect. The Comic Spirit exists in our literature, but not so in our drama; because, in bulk, our plays do not stand the test of literature.



GEORGE ADE



And yet, the theatre-goer who thinks at all on these questions as to the essence of drama will feel that something big should eventually come from American humor on the one hand, and from our national sanity on the other. Certainly, when the accomplishment reaches us, it will be fraught in large measure with the Comic Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In a consideration of Comedy, the general reader is referred to:

"An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit." George Meredith. Scribner, 1905.

"Representative English Comedies." Edited by C. M. Gayley. Macmillan, 1903.

"Molière." Translated by Curtis Hidden Page. (2 vols.) Putnam, 1908. Besides the excellence of the English versions, the books contain worthy introductory notes and a full bibliography. We would have been glad to see somewhere in these otherwise satisfactory volumes a fuller analysis of the Comic Spirit in Molière.

"Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art." S. M. Butcher. Macmillan, 1907.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A NEW OR A NATIONAL THEATRE

HERETOFORE, everything that has been written about the need for a New or a National Theatre in America has been of a speculative character. Even the excellent statistical book by William Archer and Granville Barker, — "Scheme and Estimates for a National Theatre," — dealing with the conditions for endowment as they exist in London, is of a purely chimerical, though serviceable and suggestive, nature.

But now, we have actually had a theatre in the flesh, so to speak, one worked on principles far different from the commercial theatre, one raised during its initial period far beyond the need of financial worry, one given a substantial building. And what is the result? During a trial of two years, the physical proportions of the theatre itself were found to be too large, and the deficit in the treasury stood four hundred thousand dollars.

The question is no longer, will a New Theatre succeed — but, has the idea any chance whatsoever under present theatrical conditions? For it must not be denied that the elements of success for any movement pointing to the betterment of a national art and of a National or New Theatre cannot be kept aloof from theatrical conditions as they exist.

No art given over to a *dilettante* movement, no art separated from the civic life of a people and set up in the minds



of a few individuals intent on improving the drama according to their personal tastes or according to a tradition foreign to the country in which the theatre is to exist, may ever hope for an appeal wide enough to affect national taste.

Let us look carefully into the subject, and try to reach some conclusions as to the influence of the New Theatre as it actually existed, from November, 1909, to May, 1911. If, as the promoters of the scheme claimed, it was not the object of the Directors to antagonize the commercial theatre; if, as was emphatically declared at the outset, they did not intend to appeal to the few, but to reach the masses; if, as they further asserted, they were to have nothing to do with snobbishness, even though their endowment or their subsidy or their income — call it by whatever name you please — came from wealthy sources, then what was their intent? Were they to force the public to take what was *caviare*, or were they to appeal to the public taste, as it is now trained by the commercial manager?

It would seem that, apart from the mere organization of the theatre idea, *per se*, which included much of the detail so graphically set down by Archer and Barker, the chief concern of any new artistic movement toward the betterment of theatrical condition would be in organizing a public sufficiently strong to assure the independent existence of a National or a New Theatre, which, having been founded upon endowment or subsidy, soon would become self-supporting through the suffrage of the people. There is no doubt that toward the end of two years, Winthrop Ames, as first Director of the New Theatre, not only demonstrated that there was an audience for artistic productions, but he met difficulties with a dignity commensurate with the dignity of the enterprise. He was handicapped, at the outset, with three negative conditions. First, the Board of Directors was not as generous in its support as it should

have been; second, the subscribers were not as cordial as they promised to be to the repertory idea; and finally, good plays, other than those cornered by the commercial manager, were not plentiful.

The New Theatre<sup>1</sup> was erected by a group of wealthy men — hence its popular stigma, “The Millionaire Playhouse” — who at first invested their money in the scheme with no idea of receiving or of claiming any returns on their investments, other than the privileges granted them within the theatre during its active season. Whatever profits accrued — and it was not expected that there would be any profits for at least three years — were to be handed over to the theatre as new capital. With this financial backing, the institution could be considered neither endowed nor subsidized.

Nor could we call the theatre as outlined for New York a National Theatre, inasmuch as American theatrical art is too closely allied with British art to ignore the British dramatist. Therefore, the name “New Theatre,” while non-committal, was satisfactory, although “Repertory Theatre” might have been better. But the name would not have mattered, had the idea and spirit behind the organization been sustained by the Board of Directors.

Some years ago, in discussing the mission of the modern magazine, Dr. Lyman Abbott asserted that it was doing as much as any other factor toward *deprovincializing* America. But he failed to mention among the great institutional forces of modern life the increasingly important position occupied by the theatre, a position consequent upon an increase in theatrical territory, and upon an undermining of the long existent puritanical prejudice against the theatre as a source of iniquity.

<sup>1</sup> On Central Park West and Sixty-second Street, New York City.

There are over three thousand recognized houses of amusement in this country — a large proportion of them in small towns along the railroad lines connecting the chief theatrical centres. To cut one off, as Mrs. Fiske and David Belasco were cut, from these intermediate playhouses between large cities, was business and artistic annihilation. This was the method adopted by the Theatrical Syndicate, whenever a rival was in the way.

The ethical responsibility of catering to the amusement interests of a public seems incompatible with the customary theatrical idea. In the eyes of business, art is experimental, financial returns on investment an actuality. The commercial tone in drama has resulted in three dangers characteristic of Trust ideas. First, until recently, it has very largely discouraged home production by bringing to America foreign plays already proven and already advertised. Second, it has, by pleasing the eye, given a minimum of thought to feed upon. Third, from the standpoint of organization, it has, by the variety and largeness of its interests, lost much of the essence and concentration that should mark an intelligent handling of the situation.

On the score of mere mechanical technique, on the score of the booking system, nothing may be said against theatrical organization. It is, however, from an abuse of the method and a narrowness of the motive, that the idea of a National Theatre, of a New Theatre, or of any theatre pledged to the high seriousness of dramatic art, first came into being.

It is a wrong theory that one may divorce business from dramatic art; only by material returns is one able to measure popular appeal and popular response. There might, at first glance, seem to be insuperable barriers in the way of the establishment of a National or even of a New Theatre, but apart from the human reasons, this conception is due to a wrong idea as to the exact province of an endowed or sub-

sided institution, among a number of theatres run strictly on a commercial basis.

As Percy Mackaye has reiterated, both in speech and in writing, the obliteration of the commercial manager from the theatrical horizon would in no way alter theatrical conditions as they exist, although the largest obstacle to reform might be removed. The unthinking theatre man is one with surplus business instinct, and with little innate feeling for the product he handles.<sup>1</sup> He lacks spiritual refinement; he underestimates, if he estimates at all, the spiritual and mental demands of his public. Once he has found "a good thing," he is not psychologist enough to understand that a surfeit of a particular good thing dulls popular response.

From this surfeit has grown the unfortunate condition of long runs, where the actor, whatever the extent of his ability, is allowed to work in *ruts*, where there is no changing of demands made upon his diversified talents, if he has any talent at all. The work of the American actor has done much for the American manager; it has made the best of a bad bargain; and in a season one is surprised to find isolated bits of acting which, nurtured on a *répertoire* basis, might develop into distinctive art.

There is a tendency to establish in this country a stock system, somewhat different from the old-time stock days, yet with the fundamental idea of giving to the actor the asset of a *répertoire*.<sup>2</sup> But in the stock company, which

<sup>1</sup> See Robert Grau's "The Business Man in the Amusement World," 1910.

<sup>2</sup> The ideal stock plays are "Shore Acres," "Sag Harbor," "Way Down East," "Alabama," "Arizona," "St. Elmo," "Secret Service." Plays that are released for stock often make fortunes for their authors. The final step in the progress of a play is to sell one's rights to the Kinetoscopic Theatre. Playwrights, in the latter instance, think it best to do this; otherwise the play is stolen and mutilated. In one summer stock company, it was found that

flourishes particularly in the Spring and Summer seasons, there is an inclination to overwork the actor, even though there is a tendency to raise thereby the vaudeville houses to a plane of legitimacy. And what is more, those cities that have these stock companies benefit by the revival of plays that have had their season, and would otherwise be shelved.

When it was announced that New York was to have a New Theatre, there was much adverse criticism. Part of this came from quarters naturally antagonistic to any assured competitor in the field. But despite the unsuccessful outcome of a two years' experiment, the New Theatre was in no way a competitor. While it was not as invigorating as the Théâtre Antoine and not as institutional, because not as old, as the Théâtre Française, it gave us an art faith and represented earnest endeavor.

Suspicion was instantly thrown upon the idea of a New Theatre because of its "aristocratic" origins, because of its conservative methods of changing bills, and because of its affiliation with the Metropolitan Opera House, from which source it was to draw material for light opera of the type of "Madame Butterfly." This connection was found to be unprofitable after the first season, and so, in one respect, the New Theatre became what it started out to be, a home devoted entirely to the interests of drama.

The movement, under Director Winthrop Ames, began with a prejudice to combat. Others had been ahead of him in the field and had failed; hence, there was a general distrust of any movement which might be carried on in aloofness. When there was an endeavor on foot several years ago to establish a National Art Theatre Society, however wild

a play was being given, entitled "The Tavern Keeper's Daughter," — a mixture of "The Girl of the Golden West" and "Alabama," with a flavor of "Arizona."

and unpractical the ideas behind it, there *was* a definite determination to incorporate within itself the intellectual energy of outside institutions. Upon its Board of Directors there were to have been represented a member each from the American Dramatists Club, Columbia University, the Federated Arts Society, the Authors Club, even the Bar Association and the Chamber of Commerce.

In its initial period, the New Theatre depended too much upon a close policy. And it did not reach out for material; hence it failed to secure much encouragement from any prominent American dramatist. This might have been because of two reasons: first, the American dramatist of note, being astute, may have wanted to see how the venture was to succeed before becoming identified with it; and second, the American dramatist may have wanted to protect his income, based on royalties. For his play, as accepted by the New Theatre, would probably run no more than thirty or forty times during a season, whereas the commercial manager would assure him an uninterrupted run of one hundred and forty or fifty nights. But the playwright and the manager at first lost sight of the fact that the avowed intention of the New Theatre — a faith kept for instance in the case of "The Nigger," which had a road run almost as sensational as that of Thomas A. Dixon's "The Clansman" — was to become a responsible advance agent for pieces whose excellence deserved pecuniary support.

There was no legitimate basis for mistrust of the New Theatre because its Board of Directors thought best to appoint a member of the established Theatrical Trust as an officer in the institution. This was done purely because that member could bring his force of experience to bear upon a new problem. It is one thing to regard drama as a closet product or as an art form subject to criticism, but if a theatre is to be run at all, it must deal with drama practically,



*Photo. by Otto Sarony Co.*

MINNIE MADDERN FISKE





exercising the elements of selection, expenditure, and publicity for its dissemination through proper channels. That is why a member of the commercial theatre was made treasurer.

Much ill-feeling was manifest against the New Theatre because the Director selected so many English actors for his casts, but this was very likely due to the fact that the best American players were tied up with contracts, and also because the English actor is better accustomed to the repertory idea. Miss Marlowe and Mr. Sothern opened the theatre in a sumptuous production of "Antony and Cleopatra," but, apart from whether or not the play suited their talents, their ideas were not in accord with those of the New Theatre. Miss Annie Russell became a member of the company for a period, but in no drama was she happily placed; so she resigned. The Director made a mistake when he mounted "Becky Sharp," for instead of having Mrs. Fiske in Langdon Mitchell's version of "Vanity Fair," he asked Marie Tempest, and chose Cosmo Gordon-Lennox's version.

It was the general belief some years ago, when the scheme for a National Theatre was agitated in this country, that there would be no reason why, as soon as the sentiment was thoroughly grounded, the plans should not be put into execution, as the practical outcome of a sane idealism, one which, knowing the limits of an art and realizing the differences between dramaturgy and literature, seeks for a balance between the two. But as soon as a definite building was erected, the order of reasoning was reversed. The question then became: Was the New Theatre established on the supposition that there was a public, other than a subscription public, to fill its floor and galleries? The university spirit might supply it with an audience of literary tasters, but the average public refuses to be bored. Besides which, the average

public has limited means for enjoyment, and when they went to the galleries of the New Theatre, they found the strain upon the ear, and particularly upon the eye, more than they could stand. Hence the wage earner stayed away, and it was rarely that the auditorium of the New Theatre was filled.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, at the outset, the institution was confronted with the correlated difficulties of having to select a repertory for a public which it had to train. But instead of training that public, the New Theatre dealt too much with novelty. It only realized too late that the first thing it should have done was to have accustomed its actors to a permanent stock of plays, sufficiently varied to satisfy the boxholders while new productions were in preparation. It did not realize that if it departed beyond that all-important aim of repertory, it would lift itself out of the immediate public influence, and serve only as an example of what might be, after another institution had educated public taste to receive it. The Director was wrong in his disregard of democratic interests, though he might with reason have pointed to his production of Galsworthy's "Strife" with some show of pride.

It is always well to bear in mind the purposes of a National Theatre—a home where dramatic art may be encouraged in an ideal building, where a repertory of dignified and permanent worth may be fostered, where the American play may be encouraged, where a standard of pronunciation may be adopted, a conservatory established for the education of the actor, and a dramatic library founded for those volumes which are now foolishly being scattered.

<sup>1</sup> The New Theatre, however, gave several performances at reduced prices, especially for the wage earners, and the immediate response was gratifying, though the theatre itself lost money in the venture.

With a building of ideal proportions in New York — considered to be the commercial centre of the New World, even though some might doubt its claim to being the art centre — one cannot take from New York the fact that it is the most cosmopolitan city in the Union, and that, for this reason, more people of the different sections would have an opportunity of passing through the doors of a New Theatre there than elsewhere.

The institution, at the outset, was handicapped by too large a building, the foundations of which were originally based on plans accepted by Heinrich Conried, whose ample ideas were colored by his opera ambitions. This building they were obliged to abandon after a tenure of two years, by their move showing that a New Theatre does not imply a large building, but one happily proportioned for all necessities. Had the theatre not been subjected to the hiatus of a year — during which time probably another building will be erected, more in accord with the requirements of the spoken drama — one might have been justified in concluding that an artistic and financial success would have resulted in similar theatres being built in the large cities of the country. But inasmuch as the New Theatre has had a set back, cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago are justified in attempting a National Theatre from their own individual viewpoints.

People approached the first year of the New Theatre with every hope that it would select a repertory sufficiently catholic to satisfy the masses, that it would present dramas — apart from Shakespearean revivals — sufficiently strong to show the commercial manager that it pays to select plays of true worth; that, finally, it would, through its successes, afford new incentive to the playwright, and infuse into the general theatrical situation assurance that good dramatic art is only that art which is supported through the suffrage

of the people. The New Theatre strove earnestly to fulfill these requirements, but opposition, together with its own errors, handicapped it. The period of its tenure was too short, however, to judge finally; but during its two years it had ample opportunity to alter its course on the mistakes of its first season. The Board of Directors — standing to lose, even though the figures mounted to four hundred thousand dollars — should have approached their task in this manner: After a year, has the institution, in its *répertoire* and in its acting, made any artistic impress upon the theatrical situation? After four years — for it takes that long to balance the machinery — does dramatic art pay? If it does not, then the Directors would have had a right to question whether the New Theatre had been presenting good dramatic art, by which we mean high art for the greatest numbers. But the Directors did not keep full faith with the idea of a New Theatre. After the first year had proven that the building was too large, while alterations were being made for the second season, work should have been started upon a new playhouse. For it was easily discernible that such solid physical proportions as marked the New Theatre could never be properly altered. Then there would have been no necessity to have a period of waiting, such as the New Theatre will have to go through when the season of 1911-12 begins. The resumption of an idea is difficult to foster.

Under the management of Director Ames, the New Theatre scheme did not fail.<sup>1</sup> It is something for a manager to be able to boast that under his tenure of two years, he pro-

<sup>1</sup> See W. P. Eaton's "At the New Theatre and Others;" "Scheme and Estimates for a National Theatre" by William Archer and Granville Barker; and Henry Arthur Jones's "Renascence of the English Drama." I would refer the reader to three books dealing with the English situation: Mario Borso's "The English Stage of To-day;" P. P. Howe's "The Repertory Theatre;" and Desmond McCarthy's "The Court Theatre: 1904-1907."

duced such an excellent spectacle as Maeterlinck's "The Blue Bird," such an effective social piece as Galsworthy's "Strife," such a distinctive study of characters as Pinero's "The Thunderbolt," and such a poignant morality as Maeterlinck's "Sister Beatrice." He could have done no better than to profit by the sensible and effective tastes of his assistant producers, Hamilton Bell and George Foster Platt. No commercial manager could have so excelled in the mounting of Miss Peabody's "The Piper," or of certain scenes in that peculiarly exotic piece, "The Witch," which was Americanized from the Danish, or of Shakespearean comedies. Besier's "Don" was enjoyable, George Paston's "Nobody's Daughter" far above the ordinary. In fact, the New Theatre idea cannot be called a failure.

Mr. Ames created a position of Literary Director — a person to be largely responsible for directing proper material in New Theatre channels. After the first year, the scope of this position was altered. In the first season, two thousand manuscripts were read, and from this deluge, no great American product was forthcoming. Edward Sheldon's "The Nigger," whose one excellence was its theatrical effect, even though the arrangement of its historical ideas was false to the South in the way that Mrs. Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was false to the South — was a success.

In reviewing the New Theatre idea and its existence of two years, I cannot but regard, with pleasurable feeling, the Shakespearean productions. We advance by means of our mistakes, and the Directors should have realized this. They registered no vital complaint outside the fact of losing. My grievance against the two seasons is directed against the inability of the New Theatre to encourage the American drama, even if it had had to offer special financial inducements legitimately to take the American dramatist away

from the commercial manager. Yet, when it came to selecting revivals from the American drama of the past, I would sympathize with the quandary of any Director. For the American drama is in the making, and a theatre cannot support itself on experiments that fail. Even an art theatre, however subsidized, must pay.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE NEED FOR A DRAMATIC LIBRARY

THERE have been many movements on foot to establish a dramatic library in New York and elsewhere — some full collection of books to satisfy the intellectual and technical demands of the theatrical profession. All social movements betoken a social need, and in the present extensive library development, no one has bethought himself to make a plea for this particular branch of art and literature. Yet the need is there, and the opportunity is still awaiting some one to make the *idea* of a dramatic library a *fact*.

In isolated moments, when one is vainly searching for particular books on costumes, for a special text of a play such as “Dora,” for some biographical material concerning a bygone “star,” — when one is looking for such data, then it is that, as a vain search is made here, there, and everywhere, wasting time and energy the while, there is a faint yearning for some special library where comfort, accuracy, and completeness are housed beneath one roof.

No one will deny that in the theatrical profession there may be found the specialist's pride; and the specialist in drama realizes more and more the necessity for preserving records, for so systematizing the best that has been thought and written in all departments of the theatre, as to give the worker immediate authority in whatever investigation of a professional character he has occasion to undertake.

Perhaps the ones who have suffered most in this lack of a

dramatic library have been those continuously engaged in researches connected with stage history. Undoubtedly, those who have indirectly missed quite as much have been the people whose attitude towards the theatre is a practical one, — the producing manager and his staff, usually comprising an art director, a stage director, and assistants. But the ones in the end to be most vitally hurt by this particular neglect will be those who are to inherit the traditions of theatrical history, traditions which are the common heritage of the nation in which they are practiced or formed, even though they might not, in their general character, pertain to distinct nationality.

In a narrow, local sense, there are two evident reasons why, at present, the time is opportune for urgent coöperation in this matter of a dramatic library — a coöperation among those most interested in and most intimately responsible for the drama's welfare.

First, we must realize that, even though our own history of the stage is scarcely more than a century old, our touch with the past is becoming slighter, since the veteran actors — the generations that knew Booth and Forrest and Wallack and Davenport — are passing away month by month. Second, it is most encouraging to note that, with the general interest being manifested by the public in the stage, as a world of glitter and romance, there is taking place a corresponding increase in the knowledge of those who go to the theatre, and who concern themselves with the growth and history of the drama itself.

Behind every urgent need there are to be found the social reasons for that need — the facts, for instance, that have made some of us aware of the necessity for a definite library, dealing adequately with the drama, whatever its phase. There are tremendous gaps in the chain of dramatic history to be supplied with connecting links — and every death,



every auction sale, every isolated bequeathment, makes it more difficult finally for the connection to be consummated, once the proper endowment is secured for the cause.

In libraries of a general character, there may be many books concerning the drama, but they are of miscellaneous importance, and are usually selected to satisfy the demands of the general reader. It is not indifference which causes this condition, but the peculiar function of the special circulating library which governs the selection. Even a university library cannot discriminate in its courses, as they relate to the supply of reference books, and no one should grant that it has the right to do so. Therefore, the university does not attempt to keep pace with any other than an academic interest in the literature of the drama. Much of this current material appears too trivial, indeed, is intended as nothing more than passing comment, and therefore is not worthy of preservation.

Still, this general attention is not what we are at present concerned with. We are seeking to found some centre, to suggest some means of appropriation, whereby a dramatic library, individualized and functioning alone and apart from any general Public Library, yet open to the public, may be placed in a position to become the treasure-house for all written or printed matters pertaining to the theatre in its many and varied aspects.

Such an institution must not be of trivial or of uncertain foundation; there must be a strong promise of perpetuity in it before donors will entrust their rarities to its keeping. The late Bronson Howard had this thought in mind when, after bequeathing his working library to the Dramatists Club, of which he was the founder, he added the proviso that should the Club, through any unforeseen circumstances, cease to exist, the collection — always to be individualized as "The Bronson Howard Collection for American Dram-

artists" — should be transferred to the Library of Columbia University, which should likewise be entitled to the interest on five thousand dollars for its further increase. Thus was it that Bronson Howard, in another way, added to his deserved title of "Dean of the American Drama."

Now, there is only one unfortunate circumstance attached to this gift; the club enriched thereby is a private organization, and while, through special privilege, it might be consulted, there is certain restraint upon its wide usage by the public. In the same manner, The Players is loath to make its collection accessible in a general way, and only by card from a member may one enjoy the privilege of a library of books marked more by their associative value than by the wise standard of their choice.

Rare books concerning the theatre are being indiscriminately sold. To the research worker it seems penny wise and pound foolish to wait for the day when some one *might* endow a dramatic library. Every collection gathered by a fastidious manager or by an intelligent actor, which is placed under the auctioneer's hammer, loosens our hold upon volumes of intrinsic value. I speak from actual experience; I have seen the gaps, and sensed the consequent necessities. And there is no reason why the dramatic profession itself should not establish such a foundation fund, and through its own initiative see the venture become a permanent fact.

Collections must be preserved intact, and not share the fate of Augustin Daly's books that were scattered to isolated bibliophiles and idle curio hunters. By rights, such a library should have been saved and perpetuated under the original owner's name. It was out of the question for the New York Public Library to become the purchaser, for appropriations would not have allowed such "extravagance." Any way, however adequate the New York Public Library, the Astor, Lenox, and Tilden collections combined, may be in

drama, I do not care to see a dramatic library lost amidst other collections, and shut off directly from the stream of life which should give it greatest energy.

New York's Public Library, even in its present state of dramatic incompleteness, does not quite realize the riches it already has, such richness as the Beck collection of plays, nor is there an expert — and by that I do not mean a book gatherer merely, but a man who knows something specifically about drama — who is able to meet you with a specialist's knowledge, other than that which he hastily gathers from a rather inadequate card in the catalogue drawer.

In fact, as soon as a dramatic library is assured, I should like every social institution around it, which has either designedly or accidentally become possessor of rare books on the theatre in its every phase, to hand these books over to the special library. I would rob Peter to pay Paul in this respect, provided both were assured children of the public. This specializing under such generous conditions is the next step in the development of American libraries. But, as far as drama is concerned, we are somewhat late. In the future, when our increasing interest in the playhouse has turned us into a nation of theatre-goers, proud of the institution, how many will wonder what has become of the libraries of Daly, Palmer, John Brougham, William E. Burton, and countless others?

As an instance of the fate of theatrical books: In the Daly collection was Morrell's "Life of George Holland." From a slim volume the manager had, with his numerous additional pictures, letters, notices, and manuscript notes, made two thick books. Joseph Holland, son of the comedian, was on the road at the time of the sale, and wired his order to New York. But he was too late, and assiduous inquiry failed to reveal into whose hands this personal treasure actually passed. Had there been a dramatic library, such

an historical record would<sup>h</sup> have been preserved from the obscurity which now envelops it.

At one time I had occasion to gather certain facts concerning Dion Boucicault; his son very graciously assisted me from the mass of original material he possesses. It was well-nigh impossible, notwithstanding, for our combined efforts to frame a concise, accurate bibliography of Boucicault's plays. This was partly due to the Irish writer's prolific pen and to his genius for constructing dramas that often never saw the form of *whole* manuscripts. It was equally as much due to the fact that neither of us knew exactly where to turn for further investigation. A library, properly endowed, and under wise guidance, would have facilitated such investigation.

Another need — and this a vital one. As an investigator, where am I to turn to find the farces of Charles Hoyt in accessible form, or to study the plays of James A. Herne, Steele Mackaye, Henry De Mille, and others? Some of these authors are at times represented in that undoubtedly serviceable, though ghastly and inaccurate, edition published by French, but often they are not the best of the dramas, which later are destined to remain in manuscript.

With few exceptions, whenever I have applied directly to the families possessing the "originals," I have met with unfailing courtesy, and with generous interest. But what of the future? There should be a dramatic repository for original manuscripts, made accessible to the student of drama. This lack was a possible reason for Professor Wendell's ignoring of the American drama in his "Literary History of America." Otherwise, we see no excuse for his neglect of Howard and Herne and Fitch. If the Dramatists Club does not see fit to make it a requirement that a play, properly protected, be printed, even as a university requires a thesis to be in book form, before granting a degree; if



*Photo. by Morrison*

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an organization such as the Dunlap Society had to die for lack of proper support, — then a typewritten copy of the manuscript should be deposited in a recognized place which guarantees its protection and assures its perpetuation in literary form. There is danger of losing our best specimen otherwise. I had but just returned the manuscripts of James A. Herne's "Griffith Davenport" and "Margaret Fleming," when Mrs. Herne's country home was destroyed by fire, and these only copies of the best examples of the dramatist's art were irrevocably destroyed. Had a definite literary museum for the drama been established, there would have been some incentive for the Herne family to have established a Herne collection for the enrichment of the theatre. Were this policy adopted, it would give keen pleasure to see the name of Clyde Fitch attached, in such a dignified manner, to the literature of dramatic tradition. In fact, nothing more appropriate could be than that a Fitch Memorial Collection should be made available, for instance, in New York, a city which he so well represented in his plays.

There is something stingingly true in Burke's utterance, put in the mouth of his *Rip Van Winkle*: "Are we so soon forgot when we are gone?" Players are human and die, while their sons come into their heritage, possessing all the tangible evidences of a recorded tradition in the form of manuscripts, letters, and printed data. It is not to be expected that they will lend to everyone what records they possess, yet it is not too wild a speculation to believe that they would willingly donate to a dramatic library whatever books, papers, or personalia they owned which might hold some public interest and some future value.

Of what should a dramatic library consist? It is not so simple, as at first might seem, to limit the field, for, more than any other art, the drama embraces so much that is mere accessory, and calls upon all other arts for aid. But,

beginning with a general division, there are three essential classifications: Historical, Theoretical, and Practical. Neither of these, as an actual fact, is distinct, but the three overlap, as all things do in nature. In the first of these divisions there should be placed (1) the lives of the players, and of all those connected with the stage in any way; (2) the stage history of plays; (3) the record of performances and the preservation of programs; (4) collections of pictures and plans, together with (5) the histories of theatres as homes for the acted drama. There would likewise be made available (6) complete bibliographies of all topics likely to be of immediate service to specialists.

In the second should be gathered books of a critical cast, treating (1) of the drama and its evolution, (2) of the plays in their construction, (3) of the dramatists and critics in relation to their theories and practice, (4) of characters and their various interpretations, in such style as is suggested in the *Variorum* Shakespeare, and finally (5) of the drama and its place in society.

In the third division should be gathered (1) every detail which bears upon the theatre as a working proposition; one should be able to obtain suggestions and historical guidance (2) for all designs of costume, and (3) for particular furniture or architecture peculiar to any special period. There should also be every facility (4) for tracing the entire evolution of the mechanism of the stage, such as the progress of lighting, which makes for the practical working of illusion before the "foots," or without the "foots," as Belasco and Gordon Craig desire.

The Avery Gallery, attached to the library of Columbia University, at present is the only satisfactorily equipped architectural collection for the technical study of the theatre. The books are widely consulted, much to the satisfaction of the authorities in charge, who are simply waiting an op-



portunity to coöperate with the dramatic library, once it is securely established in New York. Of course, managers have their individual books, but many works are difficult to procure, and others are needed only for momentary consultation.

It might take years to establish such an institution as we imagine, but now is none too soon to begin. One of the cherished hopes of the defunct National Art Theatre Society was to found a library of wide scope such as that later attempted by the Green Room Club of New York City, in it to have at hand one of the largest collections of dramatic books ever brought together, which would treat of the theatre and of the drama in every particular.

Where in New York City shall the student turn to be thus supplied? Wherever it behooves him to wander, he is only partly satisfied. If the Public Library has one thing, it has not the other, nor is there a systematic effort to keep up to date. Even at the present time, to repeat, the Public Library has no one in authority who is definitely assigned to a department of the drama. If asked why they fail in this respect, they will tell you that they are not required to specialize in everything. This may be a fair reason, but it does not explain their willingness to subdivide in classification, to the smallest fraction, any scientific literature of practical and public bearing.

No library at present contains such an equipment as we have in mind. On private walls and in personal albums I have come across playbills, brown and seared with age, recording a few first productions, but these walls and albums are scattered and private. Books on the drama very rapidly pass out of print: Tyrone Power's "Reminiscences of the 30's," Hackett's volume about "Falstaff," Sothorn's "Birds of a Feather," the theatrical experiences of such men as Smith, who knew his early South; of Ludlow, who caught

the spirit of the early West. Even Dunlap, Ireland, Clapp, and so recent an historian as Allston Brown are scarce in their editions. This is how the matter stands in America.

There is the academic side to every library; there is likewise the practical. Unfortunately, as regards the theatre, there are too many who are used to reading about it in a trivial fashion when, both as an institution and as a profession, it has the rights, the possibilities, of the highest art. Many attempts have been made by the disappointed playwright to establish a National Theatre; it has been found not such an easy task as was at first expected. And so is the problem going to be with a dramatic library, for first of all it must be remembered that a dramatic library is *all-inclusive* on the *subject*, at the same time that it is a *library*; that it is many-sided in its purpose, however distinctive its name; that it has its *student* side — its evolutionary and revolutionary phases — as well as its *practical* side.

The cry has been heard for many days that the university is too theoretical in its study of the stage, having neglected the fact that Molière, Shakespeare, and those of like magnitude, were primarily *practical* playwrights. On the other hand, in their turn, the university theatre-goers have appealed to public taste, have accused those in charge of the drama's welfare of being absorbed in the practical to the exclusion of the artistic. If it is not already too evident to the reader, a dramatic library must be so equipped as to balance the theoretical and the practical. Even though privately organized, it should be public; or the theatre is public, the actor in his professional capacity is public, and the drama in every detail has been born of the public.

When some years ago there was so much talk about a National Theatre, many were surprised to find themselves at sea about the word *national*. In no other phase of creative art is the inclusive meaning of the term so evident as in the

drama. More than any other form of human expression, drama is comparative, for in all countries it has many elements in common; being active, it is imitative. There is no such thing as an American dramatic library; and we are fast coming to recognize that the American drama itself is but a branch of English drama — distinctive, simply because of local atmosphere and national traits — since human passions are the same the world over. Hence, in a dramatic library, we must consider the drama as an organic whole, and that means that the Frenchman, the German, the Norwegian, the Spaniard, and the Italian must be satisfied, as well as ourselves.

The first question for us to ask is not: Where are the books? Those will be forthcoming, by subscription and by donation, just so soon as the more important questions of endowment and organization are decided. There must be no cliques, as is so often the case in innovations connected with the drama; there must be no petty jealousies. It must be a *public* dramatic library, for actors, managers, and individuals would more willingly contribute to such an institution, founded upon a broad basis, than give to a single actor, manager, or individual, as the heart and soul of a casual library movement, lasting perhaps a generation.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE DISINTEGRATION AND REGENERATION OF THE THEATRE

#### I

THE theatre in America is passing through its newspaper phase; in every department it is being influenced by those economic forces which try to inflate the market without improving the product, and which measure the product as a commodity rather than as an art. Every industry is subject to the laws of profit and loss, and the theatre is an ever-increasing industry, since the amusement territory is increasing. There is no concentration which would make New York the theatrical centre in the way that London is the hub of the United Kingdom.

Only by the combining of theatrical interests in the hands of a few dictators has the theatre settled into some orderly adjustment, exchanging independence of selection on the part of the small manager and of the actor, for certain salaried assurance. The theatrical interests have largely been held in New York, although Chicago is increasing in importance, while the road has accepted what it could get, the local manager being only a dependent, with no incentive or means to give his public what they want other than what the Syndicate might allow them.

The history of the Theatrical Trust is hardly different from the growth of any other trust, save in respect to the personalities of the men behind the combination. The magnates

who govern Wall Street know their trade down to the smallest detail; they know the men with whom they have to deal, and they are quick to measure the risk. The same may be said for the theatrical manager. But the extraordinary business man exceeds the exceptional theatre man in this large respect: he understands the way the country is going; he has his hand on the pulse of business conditions at their greatest energy; he knows how the people are thinking on public affairs. The theatre-manager has no such penetration; he launches his individual enterprises as a gamble, and depends upon the physical resources of theatricalism to "boost" his product.

The history of the men who constitute the Trust is the same in each case. Their one claim to serious consideration, outside of the sphere of menace to an art, is the fact that, having seen an opportunity to place art upon a sound commercial basis, they combined with sufficient foresight to corner the theatrical market. What they were not able to observe was that, however sound the commercial basis, art was still art, and that, while *les affaires sont les affaires*, human nature is human nature. This fact alone would assuredly betray them in the end.

We have heard much of the commercial theatre, but if we stop to think, why should not a theatre be commercial? For the play which does not draw is not acceptable to the people, and while the box-office should not limit the art, at least the art should not hold the box-office in contempt, since herein is worldly measure of its own excellence. The weak spot in the theatrical situation is not the commercial theatre, but the business methods of those behind it; and the business methods proclaim the man.

Judged by all business, large enterprises must be organized, and organization is either scrupulous or not scrupulous. The men behind the Trust were in it for profits, and having

launched enterprises, they had to make these enterprises sell. To do this, they found it necessary to control the amusement arteries of the country. Thus, audiences either had to take the food they found or else go without. This blockading system was reached through a booking agency, whereby time assignments were distributed for attractions at the pleasure of the dictators and on the payment of certain fees. Once under operation, this group of men, known as the Theatre Trust, or Theatrical Syndicate, practically became inquisitorial in its policy, tampering even with the independent opinion of the press.

Now was the time to prove the personality of the men, to measure their attitude toward art, to realize their unfitness to the full. They found the theatre business precarious, and after a fashion they placed the finances on a basis of equilibrium. But in return, the drama had to sacrifice all that conduced to the maintenance of its health as an art and as a civic force. These men were "in" for the money, and so skilful was their generalship that they told the North, South, East, and West what they must have, whether they would or no. Salaries were assured, but voices were silenced, and there was no say in the theatrical world save that of the Trust.

Then arose an opposition, the chief significance of which was that it did oppose. Cut of the same stuff, yet dissatisfied with its stock, this new combination grew because the time was ripe, and because there was enough public opinion in the air to father its growth. Factions kept coming its way, from the South and from the West, while new theatres at significant stations in the theatrical territory began to fall away from the control of the octopus. Yet, despite the disintegration brought about by this condition of affairs, we have yet to see whether or not we have on our hands more than one octopus. The meaning of this insurgency

in the theatre was nevertheless health-giving, or at least held promises of renewed hope. For, let it here be said that, after all, a manager's business is dependent upon the will of the people, however much he may dictate terms. They like what they like, and just as soon as they discriminate in their liking, the manager's standard will have to change. If good plays draw, the theatres will want good plays. Whether those at the head have sufficient judgment to know a good thing when they see it, is a matter of doubt. But the commercial theatre has a perfect right to vend mediocre musical comedies, if the people persist in wanting them.

As far as the Trust is concerned, all this time, art, the supreme cause of the theatre, the life expression of the people, was languishing beneath an ignorance of its nature. Plays were manufactured for particular "stars," and these actors, instead of the drama, were featured as the drawing attractions. The dramatized novel and musical comedy monopolized the boards. Those who were not in the game, and those who refused subjection, suffered on the road. Mr. Belasco, booking through the Trust, was denied time at St. Louis for "The Darling of the Gods" during the Exposition, while the opposition rushed its own "The Japanese Nightingale" into the breach. Mrs. Fiske, unwilling to come to terms, had to act in music halls and second-rate houses, while Mme. Bernhardt carried with her a stage and a circus tent. In the Southern circuit, the small manager was practically nothing more than a janitor, who received no concessions and who could adopt no house policy. The situation was chaotic. Actors like Richard Mansfield and Francis Wilson, who had been among the first to oppose strenuously the dictatorial policy, had, one by one, to come to terms.

Through publicity, ground was prepared for the opposition. The "open door" cry was an excellent slogan, and one

in accord with popular sentiment. An independent policy was nothing more nor less than the right for any manager, irrespective of whether or not he was a member of a trust, to "book" his attraction in any town possessing an independent theatre. This free trade even admitted of the opposition party asking for "time" in its rival's houses. For a while, this will have the appearance of healthy competition, but as events are transpiring, there is every reason to believe that the two will coalesce, and become more powerful than ever.

Meanwhile, nevertheless, the theatre has been affected by changing conditions, mental and economic. The drama, as a subject of popular consideration, is being more sanely discussed, and the type of play, closely in touch with the newspaper, reflects a different order of interests. Public agitation against old methods of management has made opportune another slogan about an endowed theatre, a civic playhouse, a memorial auditorium, wherein might be perpetuated the real classics of dramatic art — away from the blighting touch of commercialism. But even here, the popular conception is wrong. Endowment on any basis whatsoever does not permit the manager to disregard popular demand; it only allows a certain margin of risk and does not require an immediate return on the investment. It does not say, "Lose"; but it assures the manager support where there has been failure in a judicious cause.

The one danger of independence, in the commercial sense, lies in the sudden appearance of numberless mushroom managers. Though we do not see it plainly at present, the actor will eventually find that salaries will decrease, and demands on his part will fail to possess their former value. There will come a general slump in the market of stipend, and while this may aid in the establishment of stock companies, it will not guarantee, as the Trust did, that a company



in its circuit through the country will not be left high and dry somewhere in the deserts of Arizona.

In other words, the disintegration of the theatre, in spite of the efficacy of free trade, will be attendant with dangers. It might degenerate into every playwright being his own manager, just as there is an economic possibility of every author having to pay for the publication of his own book. Charles Klein has affiliated himself in a business way with the Author's Producing Company; he prefers to have this organization present Charles Klein's play than to have announced on the billboards Henry B. Harris's new play by Charles Klein (in small type). The "open door" affords an ample opportunity for the new playwright to procure a hearing; it widens the market, and increases the possibility of a production. But it lacks concentrated energy; it is wanting in the assurances of stability.

Nor has the "open door" policy prevented Charles Frohman from cornering the market in English playwrights, as certain publishers have cornered certain authors and illustrators for their exclusive use. It is all in the game of business competition. Mr. Frohman, strange to say, now finds himself in a peculiar position; he has the plays and he has not sufficient theatres in which to present them. The Shuberts, by an almost phenomenal ability to procure realty support, and by their persistent policy of fighting through the medium of a newspaper which they founded for this express purpose, have weakened the territorial influence of the old Theatrical Trust. In return, they have not succeeded in inspiring confidence as to their own intentions.

This disintegration of the theatre, therefore, points to a step which is very evident to those most desirous of honest intent. The Syndicate faction assuredly placed the theatre on a business basis, as I have indicated; but they tampered with the vital organ of the corporation, and became dicta-

torial in their booking of time, demanding excessive terms wherever they wished commercially to make a production impracticable in a neighborhood they themselves desired. There is now an essential need for a dramatic clearing-house which will ensure for the theatre business the same confidence and the same stability which the New York Clearing-House does for the banks. A man's business is his own, but when he undertakes to serve as middleman for another, then he subjects himself to ethical responsibility.

Another thing is to be said for the Theatrical Trust, however wrong it may have been in its business methods: there was an efficiency about its work that was due entirely to the experience of its theatre officials. The principle of its booking system is excellent; its advance agents are keen and alive. Nor can there be much fault found with its railroad arrangements. Only when the theatre began to disintegrate did one detect a laxity in management, due very largely to the haste with which productions were thrown upon the road, and to the calibre of the man sent ahead of the "show." However ignorant the officials governing theatrical affairs, they were sufficiently wise to bring to their aid cleverness from the outside. They took newspaper men as their press-agents and paid them large salaries to pursue a course that has well-nigh been the undoing of dramatic criticism in this country.

For the one corrective of the theatre is the publicity which is given to it in our papers. The theatre-manager assures his press representative an authoritative position, from which vantage ground he seeks to establish a chain of papers, willing to print any news emanating from the theatre office. This eagerness to accept "copy" given freely, has been largely responsible for the attitude assumed by the manager in his demand that dramatic criticism in no way be allowed to conflict with the positive effect of his advertising.

This struggle is wrong, but it may be easily attributable to the unofficial character of the theatre critic's work. The papers are not careful in their appointment of well-trained men for the position. And we need such men in this period of disintegration. It is usually argued, and rightly, that the attractions of the "pass" are too great to confine the privilege to one person; the advantages of advertising are too evident to sacrifice them to the whim of one person's idea. The press-agent's position is more sharply defined than that of the dramatic critic; he is not handicapped; he may go the limit, and he does so cleverly.

Another aspect that has aided in the disintegration of the theatre is the character of the outside forces which have detracted from the resources of the legitimate theatre. First, the vaudeville houses have organized themselves into a Trust as potent as that of the straight houses; second, the moving-picture interests have combined so thoroughly as to threaten theatre business on the road; and finally, so many theatres are being erected in the large cities, notably in New York, that they cannot be guaranteed sufficient support by the assurance of adequate demand or of worthy supply. In other words, the economics of the theatre, having passed through the stage of experimentation and organization, need to be studied with wisdom and forethought.

I cannot see where the "open door" policy is productive of large and wholesome results, *per se*. It is, of course, more honest by far to have all doors open than to work in the dark and with a cut-throat policy at hand. But there still remains the problem of personality, of manhood, in the theatrical business. The situation is quite similar to that of politics: a better class of men must be drawn into the business, even as they must be drawn into the civic life of the people. It is not enough that we have an organization; each man must be of the highest quality. It is not enough

that plays be produced in order to fill the increasing number of theatres; the producer must be instinct with art. The Theatrical Trust gave us an excellent shell; the soul has yet to be supplied.

The disintegration of the theatre has shown us the imminent dangers of theatrical organization. There are two phases of the business: the ledger side and the art side. These should be separate in working process, and the former should not limit the latter, even though art should have regard for the box-office. The crying need of the theatre at present is for a dramatic clearing-house, and for a different quality of art which flourishes upon a different spirit of organization. The outward form will be very much the same as it is now. We shall see that the theatre is disintegrating in order that it may be more closely and more soundly organized in the light of its excellences and of its failings.

## II

I believe that the theatre has much to contend with in the increasing disillusionment of its audiences. A large asset in the appreciation of a play consists in a naïve acceptance of its *papier maché* and of its convention. There was a time when this was very real to all of us, when we did not care whether thunder came from a tin sheet or the patter of rain from the rattle of peas in a pan. The press-agent has at last waked himself up to his great sin of commission: that in his publicity work he has opened the doors of wonder too wide, and has shown the miracle in shirt-sleeves. In the regeneration of the drama, one of the first things will be to bring back the old-fashioned curiosity of audiences.

This will mean that the keen virtue of imagination will have to be cultivated. When we criticise the paucity of the Elizabethan stage with its paper signs, or of the mystery-

play platform with its bowl of water for the sea, we discount the responsiveness of an audience, whose education may not have been as general as ours, but whose minds were more active and more sensitive to mere suggestion. So rapidly has illusion deserted us, and so surprisingly have the mechanical excellences of the theatre increased that, in order to retain the shadow of "make-believe," audiences demand settings which materially decrease the manager's chances for large profits.

Such expenditure is warranted in spectacular pieces like "Ben-Hur" and "The Shepherd King," where the plays themselves had attractive appeal. But scenery can no longer prop a weak drama, for the simple reason that the people are at last beginning to know something of the art of the theatre. To a certain degree, the press-agent has been responsible for this. Not that his journalism has lost any of its advertising quality, but he is becoming more judicious in his statements, and more sparing of his credulous stories. There has even been a change, within recent years, as regards the wild hero-worship which traveled in the wake of the "star" system — a hero-worship largely fed by the bits of stage gossip furnished from the press department of every manager's office.

This condition is improving. Though the press-agent is still primarily an advertiser for his "show," he is smart enough to understand that his audience is manifesting interest in the technique of the theatre. The education which is thus taking place is somewhat due to the yearly publication of popular books on the drama by men who have knowledge, yet are gifted with an unscholastic style. While these volumes expound no new principles, they at least familiarize the public with those fundamental characteristics which combine to make an excellent play. The critiques thus gathered together in no way boast of the literary

distinction of the work of Hazlitt, Lamb, or Lewes; but in their journalistic stricture, they do accustom theatre-goers to question technique in drama as they would demand balance in art. What is now needed in our criticism is a more rigid scrutiny of our right to enjoy certain amusements, and a more minute examination of the methods of the actor as a creative artist.

In other words, — indirectly through the better class press-agent; directly through the conscientious critic; and partly through the publication of plays, — the theatre is receiving an intellectual training which the commercial manager already finds himself bound to recognize. Audiences are becoming technicians, despite the old cry of the tired business man.

The unrest which marks general theatrical interests, and the dearth of plays which strains the manager's ingenuity, are sufficient indication that no "open door" policy will bring immediate relief, even though it give the unheard playwright a hearing and a chance. The New Theatre in its first year examined two thousand manuscripts for probably six acceptances. We are all writing plays, but they have the demerits of imitation, and lack the strength of the soil. The one school which we have in the drama is in the observation of American conditions — especially as they apply to business affairs. Once there was opportunity to do big work in the aspects of rural life, but even James A. Herne was touched by a fast declining melodrama which soon went out of date, even as the sentiment peculiar to it disappeared, despite its splendid odor of rosemary.

In the regeneration of the theatre, therefore, the playwright is growing to recognize that his own citizenship means something in the conception of his drama; that the one original opportunity of the outward drama, apart from the spiritual essence of it, lies in the locality of which Howells,

Bret Harte, Octave Thanet, Page, and Cable have made so much in literature. The scenic idea has created a seeable American drama, but hardly a readable one or a preservable one. "Salomy Jane," "The Girl of the Golden West," "In Old Kentucky," "Way Down East," "Sag Harbor," and such titles occur to everyone; in fact, it is not too rash to state that the theatre, topographically, has very well considered the local differences of the country. But as yet the activity of dramatic authorship has also become too diffuse — a characteristic of newspaper training, and showing a want of set purpose other than to write something for the theatre which affords large returns upon the right thing.

Yet the widespread interest, as I see it, will mean that a man properly accustomed to exact technique, and well-trained in the professional and in the cultural phases of his trade, will at last experiment in drawing from the soil matter which is the essence of national life. This consciousness of the matter at hand is not cultivated by artificial means, but comes through necessity from within, through big conviction, through personal belief, through consuming interest in this condition and in that type. It is not a mere observational, reportorial drama, such as we have in "The Lion and the Mouse," or in "The Gamblers." Not one of our American dramatists can thus far boast of challenging public thought or of rousing public interest, other than that of fictitious excitement.

Our theatre needs a body of ideas; it needs to reflect in better ways the undercurrent of American life. It lags behind the newspaper instead of leaping forward and making the newspaper keep up with it in civic pride and in common honesty. If we are given poetic drama, it has the scholastic idea that "Marlowe" and "Sappho and Phaon" are better than "Hiawatha" and an epic of wheat, of hemp, or of the New England conscience. If the play is social, it

simply dramatizes the newspapers, busying itself about the outward movement of life. The playwright knows that he is sure of sympathy from audiences whenever he places the warmth of American character in contrast with the artificiality of foreign social intrigue; hence the popularity of Booth Tarkington's "The Man from Home," and "The Gentleman from Indiana." He knows that a certain representation of the stress and strain of Wall Street will rouse curiosity; hence "The Pit." But he is too prone to lose sight of the ethics of business in the noise of "buncoism;" hence "The Gamblers" and "Get-rich-quick Wallingford." That is the usual inclination of the reporter after a story.

The lure of large profits has been responsible to a marked degree for the general weakness of our native drama. Writers without technique in this special field have identified the narrative conversation of fiction with the vital dialogue of the stage, not realizing that the structure in each is different. Yet one cannot help believing that the interest of the literary man in the theatre will affect the intellectual character of its future.

But the literary man is not a frequent theatre-goer; whenever he is detected in numbers in the auditorium, it is safe to reckon that he has been brought there by a promise, not of drama in the theatrical sense, but of ideas in the literary sense. If he likes the ideas, but finds that critically the drama fails to be drama, he condemns the theatre and hastens outside to deplore the decadence of the stage. Thomas Bailey Aldrich never could realize why "Judith of Bethulia" did not prove acceptable; he attributed it to the uncultivation of the theatre-going public, rather than to his own failure to meet some of the essential requirements of drama. Percy Mackaye, understanding the theory of stagecraft, persists in clogging his dialogue with sentiments and allusions wholly unsuited to quick-moving minds.



Since this is the literary condition of the drama, it is safe to count the literary *clientèle* as a body in itself dedicated to the improvement of the theatre according to wrong methods. In fact, since the Puritan first lodged his diatribe against actor folk, there has been a persistent cry for the improvement of the stage. Societies for dramatic betterment have risen upon their own hopes and fallen because of their own mistakes. Conditions are altered, not by dilettanteism, but by whole knowledge and sound conviction. Audiences may organize for the encouragement of particular plays, but the big public outside of cliques will have its say, and will register its decisions at the box-office. I have seen committees of various organizations at the theatre, sent to report on the relative merits of a play. I have seen the reports: trite, commonplace, sweepingly impertinent in approval or disapproval. The theatre is not harmed by such a show of false culture, and there is some humor in the fact that, though the drama is little influenced by such ostentatious intellectuality, the cliques themselves are at least being made to take themselves and the drama seriously. Undoubtedly they would have much more pleasure if they were able, which they are not, to join the vulgar crowd in its enjoyment. By their superiority, they are violating the very essential spirit of the theatre.

Yet I do not wish to convey the idea that I want this connection between literature and the theatre to be so close as to hinder the theatre. Drama is no handmaiden to literature; it is the highest type of literary expression and the most difficult in which to excel. The disintegration of the theatre, as we have examined it, indicates clearly that the methods of the Trust have not kept the good play from its rightful public, for since the talk of the "open door," we have had no startling discoveries in the way of exceptional productions. The process of reorganization shows that in-

tellectual improvement must be coincident with the higher and more honest standard of presentation. For when we speak of social and economic forces in the theatre, we speak of the drama as a commodity and as an art.

## CHAPTER XIX

### L'ENVOIE

#### I

PRESENT-DAY dramatic criticism in America is not an art, but a pastime; one does not have to be specially trained for the position, but more generally assigned *to* the position, which is but another way of claiming that a play is more likely to be reported than to be reviewed.

There are legitimate reasons for such a status, reasons incontrovertible without a change in theatre management on one hand and in journalistic policy on the other. As matters now stand, there is not a financial editor who does not believe himself as well equipped to render a decision upon a play as the average theatre reporter — and no doubt he is right. The want of authority, other than that attached to the privilege of the “pass,” makes of the general professional theatre-goer, who writes a column the morning after, a figurehead no less than a deadhead. And it is just this lack of understanding as to what his province really is that threatens to jeopardize the position of the dramatic critic, in view of the essential necessity of the press-agent to the theatre as a business. At the present moment, we are witnessing an interesting struggle for the survival of the fittest; the press-agent of necessity is required to systematize his business; the dramatic critic, save in isolated cases, is not allowed to declare his policy.

The diversity of opinion that we find in the morning paper

after a "first night" is more likely due to an unpreparedness, a lack of critical viewpoint, than to any fundamental logical difference. And it is the lightness with which the decision is rendered that shakes the confidence of the reading public. The dramatic critic rarely speaks with authority; if he does, he is in danger of hurting business. There is no question as to whether the view of the theatre taken by the city editor, simply as a field for possible sensational news, does not detract from the dignity of the critic's own department. The city editor's stand and the critic's stand are both legitimate, yet they are far from being the same — or else, they should not be.

The dramatic critic is not regarded as a necessity; he is generally a sufferance. It is more often the case that the editor looks askance at the prospect of engaging a man who must, so the inference runs, be possessor of a jaded intellect in view of his long service in the theatre. The drama is the only art where, to-day, it is not a requisite to have training and experience to render a decision; where expert opinion is discounted in the face of the reporter and the press-agent. After all, says the average theatre-goer to the critic, it is your opinion *vs.* mine. You *report* that a play is bad; you do not *establish* the fact by any formulation of your opinion; my judgment is as likely to be as authoritative. Because there is a large element of truth in what he says, dramatic criticism is being threatened.

The requirements of journalism are more favorable to the reporter and to the press-agent than to the critic, for the simple reason that the theatre news reinforces the advantages of advertising. Those "official critics" who have attempted to summarize a week's theatre activity in a column or two of the Sunday edition have either underestimated the mental capacity of their readers, or else have failed, except in a very few cases, to understand that criticism,

as Walkley has declared, is not a parasitic art alone, but a creative one as well — creative of an original outlook provoked by the exigencies of the occasion, but more naturally by the force of sound conviction. James Huneker is a representative of the right type, but he is no longer a dramatic critic of the conventional order; he is “off duty forever” in the journalistic sense.

Every man, in his way, is a critic; he measures the capacity of art by his own capacity to enjoy art. Hence, there are among us some few who can span the arches of a masterpiece, and those there are who are good authorities on vaudeville! But they are not equipped as they should be with the complete understanding that assures one the third dimension and gives one glimmering hope of a possible fourth. There are critical processes which do not come within the calculations of the public, but which belong distinctively to the critic — identification and detachment, characterized by Le Bon as the psychology of the individual and of the crowd — the proper relation of comparative values — the correct and familiar uses of the factors in technique — the unerring appreciation of the creative forces behind art.

Viewed in this light, the work of the dramatic critic is no minor task; in its way dependent upon a product outside of itself, it is at once a dictum and an outlook; it is restrictive of a form and expressive of an idea; it is no sine-cure, but a responsibility.

It is difficult to imagine appreciation as an exact science, even though there are recognized standards in drama, as there are in other art species, to allow of Matthew Arnold's definition of criticism. But it is preposterous to claim that the critic is so callous to emotional response as to be coolly conscious of a wilful juxtaposition of the experiment with the norm. He must be a keen and sympathetic observer of all that constitutes life, to recognize how perfectly or how

badly the artist has *re-presented* life by means of its most progressive, yet unconsecutive, moments. To him the playhouse, in its threefold capacity of business, institution, and art museum, becomes one of the civic centres for deepest realization of self-expression. He is to take his orchestra chair with a sense that though a scholar — that is, a workman with his tools by right — he is not a scholastic; that, though writing for the morrow, he is framing opinion beyond the morrow; that, though analyzing what he himself might not be able to do as well, he is doing ably what his experience has made as second nature to him. He sees unerringly and his mind is clear. He knows what good art is and he questions the presence of bad art.

This is perhaps theoretical and ideal, yet had we gone to the theatre with Aristotle, our classic figure of a critic, we would have been taken behind the simulation of nature into a discussion of the very nature principles themselves. The Greeks, as dramatic critics, were a little contemptuous of this reflex life we call drama. In fact, run your memory along the evolution of criticism as applied to the ancient playhouse, and you will find that the attitude is largely philosophical, and wholly ruled out of the present province of the dramatic critic. In other words, with the modern recognition of the theatre as a *live* activity in the civic body, drama has peculiarly become severed from literature, of which it is a legitimate and significant part.

Here, then, is one of the first steps in the rehabilitation of the dramatic critic: to realize that, however journalistic his career, he stands primarily for the dramatic spirit and secondarily for the theatrical fact. He must claim for the theatre its literary dignity — which will place bits of the striking realism of Herne by the side of a similar realism in Howells. It is peculiar how closely to the fundamental philosophy of the dramatic both Mr. Howells and Mr. James

stand, without possessing that burning *sense* of the theatre which should be an asset to the theatre critic. This is no doubt due to the limitation of the novelist, whose technique is different from that of the dramatist, a fact he does not half realize until failure on the boards drives it home.

The critic, therefore, is doubly sensitized: he is a lover of art and a lover of life; he is to keep them separate and yet view them conjointly, even as he measures his individual impression, his estimate of the crowd from without its circle of appreciation, and his impression as a unit in that crowd. His decisions are not had by text-book definitions; they are realized by right of his possession. Of what? That by virtue of which I am I, meaning the public—and he the critic. Your opinion *vs.* mine! Are the conditions such as to warrant my challenging the critical authority in the theatre?

We value what Henry Arthur Jones writes of the play-house, not so much because he is invigorating, as because he is sane and progressive in the face of his national limitations. Nevertheless, it is unwise for a dramatist to place himself in the position of a critic, to furnish the weapons by which later he is almost invariably wounded. Percy Mackaye has written a book measuring democratic tendencies in the present-day theatre. But it is for the critic to tell us what the drama of democracy is to be; the dramatist is to give us the type if he can. It is for the critic to analyze wherein the poetic and commonplace may be blended on our stage; the dramatist is to blend the qualities. The critical faculty is always ahead of creative activity, but our dramatic reporter seems to be almost slavishly dependent upon the product; he deals with the *new* play and does not attempt to go behind or beyond it.

In his prefaces and in his dramatic opinions, Shaw reveals a rare discrimination and a delicious wit; his essays are literature by the sheer force of his personality rather than

because of the vital substance of the individual plays. This is the reason Jones as a critic is of more sound importance, in that he reflects tendencies, movements, national feelings, rather than himself. The dominant personality of Shaw is not the critical faculty, nor would the critic be allowed his liberties. We accept his "Quintessence of Ibsenism" because not everyone can discard Ibsen so impertinently and give us instead the "Quintessence of Shaw." But he is a good handbook for critics; sometimes we question whether his critical bravery is not wholly dependent upon Irish wit.

Place Shaw's book by the side of Walter Eaton's volumes of American reviews culled from the *New York Sun* and other papers: the one is brilliant, the other is excellent and clever, marred on the one hand by a journalistic intimacy of style and colloquial jargon, and on the other by a staid New England moral reticence which we applaud, despite its unprogressiveness. Yet both Shaw and Eaton exhibit in their books the underlying weakness of the dramatic critic's claim to literary permanence. They are dealing with transitory stuff; their critical sermons are founded upon theatrical quicksand; they outline the plots of plays that die within a twelvemonth.

Therefore, the dramatic critic, by nature of his transitory material, has somehow had thrust upon him the reporter's immediate expression. But the demand of journalism has perverted the function of dramatic criticism as it has the scope of literary criticism. Among our newspaper editors, Paul Elmer More alone has the opportunity of expressing himself fully in the columns of the *New York Evening Post* and *Nation*, using the essay form. But the dramatic critic who, in the discussion of an inferior comedy or a mediocre farce, should brush it aside lightly in his desire to pay tribute to the excellence of Charles Hoyt, would not only be com-



mitting a breach against reportorial timeliness, but would be committing a breach of courtesy against the advertising column. The fact of the matter is that true dramatic criticism will flourish only after journalism recognizes its essential authority.

The critic and the press-agent are not antagonistic factors in the theatre scheme; the struggle that is taking place is due entirely to the fact that the manager requires expert system and the editor is not over-anxious for expert decision. Through excellent systematization, I have heard a press-agent claim that within twenty-four hours he could command the columns of a chain of papers stretching from coast to coast; he did not mean that he could, or would, limit the expression of the critic on any of these papers, but that he could send to these papers sufficiently attractive "dramatic stories" to warrant their being used as "copy." The press-agent is generally a trained newspaper man; if he be a wise man, he will keep within the limit of credulity; but his essential business is to create interest in his particular "attraction." In our Sunday papers we have seen the discussion of the race problem, and we feel assured that the press-agent for Zangwill's "The Melting Pot" has done some intelligent free advertising. He has, prompted by keen instinct, killed two birds with one stone; he has appealed to the city editor's desire for bright, live "copy"; he has sounded the fundamental note of his play.

The common expression we hear is: "Oh, that's a press story." But the agent who courts false sensationalism, who circulates personalities that are off color, who miscalculates the intelligence of the newspaper man, is not typical of his class. The press-agent to-day is a man of concentrated energy, with a ready pen and a quick judgment. He must keep faith with his manager and with the editor. He must not try to make the reporter believe that there is good fishing in the

Hippodrome tank, yet such a wild story is good advertising, if used properly.

A most prominent press-agent has written to me of his calling; his words, uttered with authority, are representative of his profession. He says:

"The agent, having 'held down the dramatic desk' himself, understands the honor, pride, and traditions of the position, and is not likely to ask absurdities or impossibilities. . . . The old-time agent — the man with the high hat, lightning-rod shirt, diamond headlight, and the general make-up of an interlocutor in a minstrel 'first part,' . . . but who cannot write two consecutive grammatical sentences, has passed away. Such a one now would be worse than useless, except possibly in the smaller one-night towns where glitter and imposing appearance awe the natives. . . . It is the man with ideas who can write — he it is who succeeds as an agent in the city or on the road to-day — the quiet, energetic, thinking man who studies the style, requirements and policy of each paper, . . . who gives to the critic salient data about plays and players, . . . and who leaves the critic entirely alone when the latter is to write his opinion of the performance."

This is a concise statement of the press-agent's province; he aids the theatre advertising; he is at the service of the theatre reporter. He has done his work so excellently that the manager has come to believe that no statement should be printed in a paper, sufficiently strong to counteract the good work of the press-agent on the one hand, or the force of his *paid* advertising on the other. We have known in the course of theatre history instances where dramatic critics have been removed because they have spoken out fearlessly; we have been told of other instances where managers have gone to the editor with the demand that the critic be removed, a demand reinforced by the threat of withdrawing

newspaper patronage. Is there a critic to-day worth the sacrifice in advertising of thousands of dollars? Yet the present state of dramatic criticism is due to a lack of moral support on the part of journalism.

We need a thorough rehabilitation of this profession; until that time arrives, we are safe in pursuing the policy of your opinion *vs.* mine. It is the drama itself that is suffering from the lack of dramatic criticism, not the public. Our reporters are toying with a serious art; they are exploiting and not attempting to create. But there is no denying that the dramatic critic who now lacks full preparation, who is not given authority, who does not probe further than he sees, will remain the reporter until he is liberally prepared, is clothed in authority of expression, and is afforded the proper medium for full creative criticism; until he is *backed* by his editor.

## II

A dramatic critic's position is not an easy one, and he is only on the safe road when he separates the personal from the impersonal. For his opinion of a product should in no way affect his opinion of the man whom he criticizes. It is a difficult problem to be critical, at the same time realizing that the personality of the man was far greater than his art accomplishment. In the preceding pages, strictures have been made against friends, but honesty of purpose justifies the statements. Not many authors have the bigness to take criticism at its face value, no matter from what source, and to measure its sincerity. In the working out of this book, however, I have been met with remarkable examples of simple faith and cultured courtesy. I look back upon my association with Mr. Howard and Mr. Fitch, and realize that though we sometimes disagreed critically, these men felt it worth while to clear up their opinions or mine. I

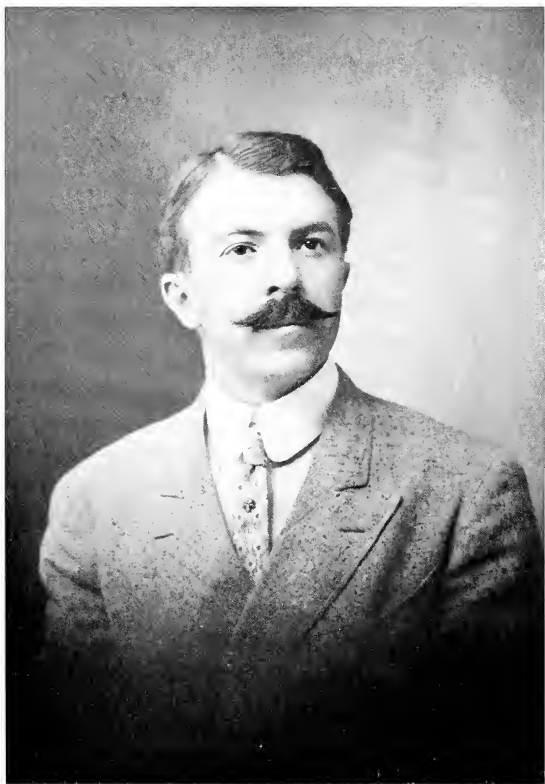
remember the serious intensity of Mr. Mackaye, who might not agree with me as to the province of the drama in a democracy, but who, nevertheless, accepted my opinion as coming with no other object than to sound the truth.

But as soon as a dramatic critic appears between covers in an avowed survey of American drama, he then is challenged on all hands. Some say, Does he not realize that in Louisiana at one time there flourished a Creole drama which was not only written, but was acted in a definite French theatre? And the answer comes: Yes, Alcée Fortier has suggested a rich field for the research worker, but though here was a hybrid type on American soil, it had little to do with American drama as we have defined it, even though it might have been inspired by American incident. The mere fact of the foreign language would rule it from our consideration.

Others say, Why has he so persistently ignored the women dramatists? And there is only one reply for that. After one has measured the excellence of Marguerite Merrington's "Captain Letterblair" (1892), and the varied products by Martha Morton, Grace Livingston Furniss, Rida Johnson Young, Margaret Mayo, and Genevieve Haines, there is little to say individually except that the cleverness of dialogue and situation show women to be factors in the theatre of to-day. There is only one of them who has established a style and an attitude. I mean Rachel Crothers, whose "The Three of Us" and "A Man's World" display active reasoning.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, contemporary drama in America is plentiful, but only after it survives the newspaper critic and the public should it be reckoned in its relation to the body dramaturgic

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Fiske has written several effective playlets, among them the following: "The Rose," "The Eyes of the Heart," and "A Light from St. Agnes."



*Photo. by Otto Sarony Co.*

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as a whole. Eugene Walter's "The Easiest Way" shows excellent technique and poignant handling, but it is, after all, only a bit of reportorial realism which he has not so far surpassed. At present he does not even justify the statement that he is a man of one lasting play, as Moody may claim to be in "The Great Divide." In a period when nearly every one inspired to write is writing plays, it were futile to give separate consideration to dramas which may draw but which in no way strengthen the dramatic idea in America. There are numberless men who may be grouped in the class of newspaper paragraphers; they have given amusement of various sorts to crowded houses, but they have stood for little more than this popular amusement. Richard Harding Davis belongs to this class; so do Edwin Milton Royle, Channing Pollock, Rupert Hughes, Paul Armstrong, Willis Steele, Henry Blossom, William Collier, and C. M. S. McClellan. An historical survey is never contemporary, and the fairest way for a critic to approach the theatre is from the standpoint of dominant personalities and general tendencies.<sup>1</sup>

Playwriting is lucrative, but these men and women know that it flourishes upon disappointment, upon the power of taking infinite pains. It has its many forms, but in each the essential theatrical requirement is construction, and it is this which proves the stumbling block to so many aspirants. But there is the equally important element which, it is to be hoped, the foregoing studies have emphasized — the element which goes hand in hand with construction — Idea. And all these minor playwrights, minor in attitude if not in accomplishment, have awakened within the past decade to the fact that the American dramatist will find that Idea in the

<sup>1</sup> For contemporary records, the student is referred to *The Theatre Magazine*, under the excellent editorial supervision of Arthur Hornblow.

hopes and passions, the struggles, defeats, and victories which constitute American life. That is the forceful fact which will persist after any consideration of the American dramatist, from whatever viewpoint he may be regarded. And the duty of the dramatic critic is to abet any sincere effort that holds life and truth above glory and gain.



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